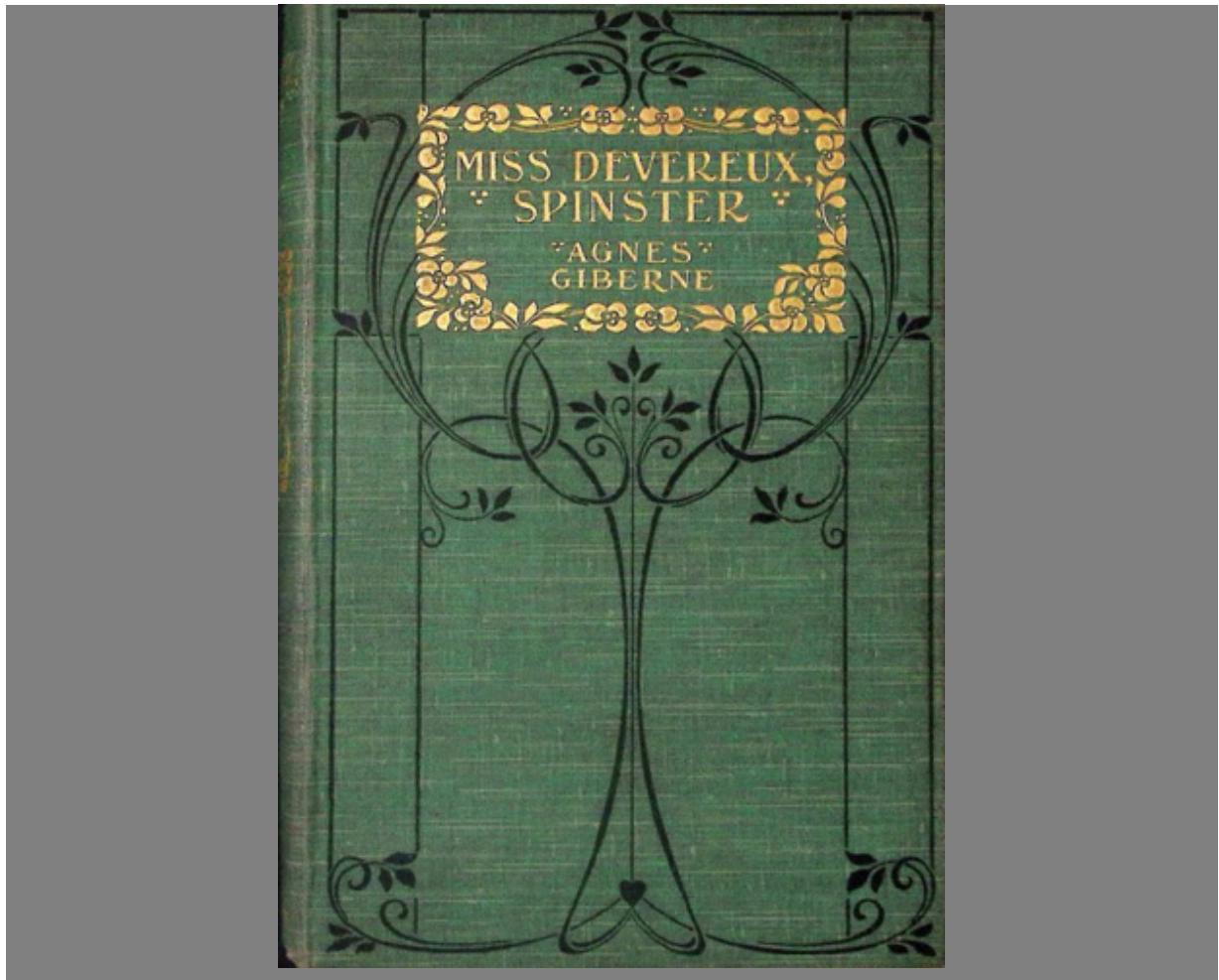


MISS DEVEREUX,
"SPINSTER"

"AGNES"
GIBERNE



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MISS DEVEREUX, SPINSTER

BY

AGNES GIBERNE

*AUTHOR OF "SUN, MOON AND STARS," "SWEETBRIAR,"
ETC.*

*"Take thou no thought for aught save right and truth,
Life holds for finer souls no equal prize."*

L. MORRIS

NEW EDITION

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MISS DEVEREUX, SPINSTER

BOOK I.

IN CHILDHOOD'S HOUR.

"A silent creature, thoughtful, grave, sincere."
JEAN INGELOW.

CHAPTER I.

A MIDDLE-AGED YOUNG LADY.

"Sensibility, how charming!"
BURNS.

"IF only I had some one to tell me what to do!" sighed Miss Devereux, an anxious pucker wrinkling her forehead.

It was the first time in Sybella Devereux' life that she had ever had to stand alone.

The morning-room which she occupied was better fitted for summer than winter uses. Indian matting covered the floor; Indian drapery clothed the walls; light cane chairs of foreign make were scattered among tables no less fragile. This being June, a fringe of Gloire de Dijon roses peered in at the open French window. Had it been December, the morning-room would have been forsaken.

Sybella Devereux had taken one of the slight chairs, beside one of the flimsy tables. A writing-case was open, and two or three letters were outspread.

Few would have guessed her at first sight to be within a few months of forty. She had lived the sheltered life of many English daughters in easy circumstances—a life of moderate occupation, of small trouble or responsibility. Sybella had taken life as she found it. She was not a woman to carve out a career for herself in the face of circumstances. She counted herself delicate, and liked to be comfortable. If any latent force of character had existed in her originally, circumstances had tended to smother rather than to draw it out.

From babyhood she had been thought of, guarded, cared for, directed, never left to decide for herself. As an arm or leg will wither if tied up and not used, so the power of mental decision had withered in her from lack of exercise.

Years had trickled past in monotonous ease, and her girlhood had lingered long after the lawful stage, "dying hard." It was ample time for Sybella to be settling down into old maidhood; at least according to all laws of fiction. She did not, however, yet count herself to be an old maid.

There were no lines of grey in her hair; and if the cheeks were rather thin, rumpling into suspicious ridges when she smiled, that was only because she had always been "so delicate, you know!" She wore slight mourning for a sister-in-law, the wife of her only brother, who was expected home shortly from India; otherwise she would not have hesitated to sport a white dress with blue ribbons, as suited to the season.

That which marked Sybella as apart from the young ladyhood of the day was not so much any definite look of middle-age; it was rather a certain sentimentality, a self-conscious bashfulness, belonging entirely to a past generation. Girls of sixteen and eighteen growing up around Sybella were twenty times as practical, as independent, as much at their ease, as was she.

Sybella's father, Sir John Devereux, a kind-hearted and placid old gentleman, who, like his daughter, took life much as he found it, had died two years earlier. He left his small property of Ripley Brow, with the Baronetcy, to his son Theodore, a successful Indian civilian, stipulating only that his widowed sister, Mrs. Willoughby, for thirty-five years his companion and stay, should live there during the rest of her life. Theodore offered no objections to this proviso. Until the

loss of his own wife broke him down, and destroyed the charm of India, he much preferred to stay there, leaving Ripley Brow to the management of his aunt and sister.

Or, rather, of his aunt. Sybella was the managed, not the manager. The loss of her father made little difference in this respect. She was still hedged round with care. She could still go on with her mild circle of occupations—her attentions to pet plants, her scraps of useless fancy work, her chit-chat calls upon neighbours, her epistolary gushes to bosom friends. The circle of occupations included also futile attempts at painting, fitful readings and copyings of poetry, dilettante dippings into social questions beyond her depth, and through all an unswerving devotion to her own health.

The controlling spirit of the household had ever been that of the stately and fascinating old lady, whose forceful nature was in marked contrast with the indeterminate outlines of Sybella's character. Mrs. Willoughby, far from accepting life as she found it, expected everything to bend to her will. Circumstances, in the shape of yielding parents, an indulgent husband, a devoted and easy brother, a submissive niece, ample means, and hosts of admiring friends, had fostered to excess a naturally wilful tendency. At the age of seventy-eight, Mrs. Willoughby could brook no contradiction. Yet she knew how to make herself ineffably charming.

Sybella was always "the child" to Mrs. Willoughby. Nothing had ever been left in her hands. She had never so much as dreamt of assuming her rightful position in her father's house. Mrs. Willoughby had managed everything. At thirty-nine, Sybella knew as much about housekeeping as an infant. She had never chosen a dress for herself unadvised. She had never written a cheque. She had never glanced into household accounts.

Now, without warning, the vigorous old lady, to whom illness was a thing unknown, had been smitten down by paralysis. The reins of government slid from her firm grasp into the helpless hands of Sybella.

She looked most helpless, seated beside the rickety table of wickerwork. Knowing nothing of real illness, though much used to cossetting of small ailments in her own person, the state of Mrs. Willoughby weighed upon her less than the immediate need for decision upon a hundred minor matters. In a few weeks, no doubt, her aunt would be up and about again. Dr. Ingram had not exactly said so, it is true; but Sybella hardly thought of any other possibility. The pressing question was—how the world could run its course meantime, without Mrs. Willoughby to direct it?

"If only I had some one to tell me what to do!" sighed Sybella. "Just now especially—such an awkward time! A month later it would not have been so bad. Dear Theodore will be at home, and men always know about everything. Till he comes, I really have nobody to turn to. And so many things ought to be arranged."

She drew another plaintive breath, looked towards the bookcase, and felt tempted to solace herself with Mrs. Heman's "Songs of the Affections."

"I suppose I ought not. These letters have to be answered; and I don't in the least know what to say. If there were some one whom I could consult. I am so at a loss where to turn. Mr. Kennedy—I am sure he would do anything in his power. But then he is not exactly businesslike. Dear aunt always says that he is not. Only last week she was so vexed

because he forgot to acknowledge that subscription. And yet he is such a good man; and he does preach such beautiful comforting sermons! Still I am afraid he might not know what to advise about the lawyer's letter, and that is what I need most. Besides, dear aunt never quite likes Mrs. Kennedy. I am sure she would be vexed if any of our private affairs came before her. And Mr. Kennedy is so forgetful, poor dear man! He might repeat things to his wife—men so often do. That is the worst of being married."

Sybella twiddled her ivory pen-handle in an aimless way, as she reviewed the situation.

"Then there is Mr. Trevelyan. If only he were a different sort of man! It would seem so natural to turn to him—living in his Parish. Quite impossible, of course—dear aunt disapproving of his views as she does. And if there is one man I do dislike more than any other, it is Mr. Trevelyan! That manner is so unbearable. Of course, not going to his Church, one could not very well ask his help, even if dear aunt would approve. We have kept well aloof from the Trevelyans till now—happily. Besides, even if there were no other objections, he is a widower."

A blush mantled in Miss Devereux' cheeks.

"One has to be careful, especially in a place like Dulveriford. Everything is so talked about. People might say—but, of course, Mr. Trevelyan is out of the question . . . Then there is Dr. Ingram. He will come in presently, and I might get his advice—perhaps—but I am not sure. He is such a new acquaintance—and then he is so shy! If only our dear old Dr. Symonds were here, he would do anything in the world for me. Dr. Ingram is different. They say he is much cleverer than Dr. Symonds; but I can't quite make him out. One does not feel at one's ease with him, somehow. I

should think he could be sarcastic. Besides, he is a widower too. So, of course, I have to be careful. It is extraordinary, the number of widowers in this neighbourhood—and rather tiresome! I do think clergymen and doctors ought not to be unmarried, for the sake of other people. It makes things so uncomfortable."

Sybella, leant her cheek pensively on her hand. She was given to attitudinising in a mild fashion. A tap, twice repeated, was unheard; and the door opened.

"If you please, Miss—"

"Pearce! Yes; do you want anything?"

"General Villiers desires to see you, Miss."

Sybella started up in a flutter.

"General Villiers! Not from India! My brother's friend! Impossible! It must be somebody else. General Villiers would never have left Sir Theodore to come by an earlier mail; unless, indeed, they have come together. Sir Theodore there too? No! But you are sure it is General Villiers, of Dutton Park?"

Pearce signified that there could be no mistake. He was an old retainer. General Villiers was well known to him, not only as Sir Theodore's intimate friend, but as the present owner of Dutton Park, a neighbouring property. The estate had been left to General Villiers some two years earlier by an aged relative, and he had not yet been home to inspect it. He was expected to arrive three weeks later, with Sir Theodore and little Cyril.

"I don't understand. It is so strange," Sybella went on excitedly. "If my dear aunt—" and there was an unhappy

recollection that she must act for herself. "Perhaps I had better see him in here," she said uncertainly.

"Yes, Miss!" and Pearce vanished.

A soldierly man entered, tall, upright as a dart, and slender still, despite his more than fifty-five summers. He had bronzed handsome features, and his hair was variegated with gray. Close behind walked a small boy, white-faced and pretty.

Miss Devereux had not seen the General for fifteen years. She came forward in a hesitating manner, to be met by a courtly bow and warm hand-clasp.

"I am grieved to hear of Mrs. Willoughby's illness. Pardon my intrusion at such a time. Unhappily there is reason," the General said in a deep, moved voice.

"Yes; oh, pray take a chair." Miss Devereux glanced round in search of a support not too ethereal for six feet two of human length. The General relieved her anxiety by depositing himself with care upon a fragile construction of cane. Fortunately he was not stout.

"If my dear aunt were here, she would—" Miss Devereux began, and paused. "Yes, she is ill. I hope and trust she will soon be better. Dr. Ingram seems to think—"

Another break. Sybella's lack of decision often showed itself in unfinished sentences. Her words ran ahead of her ideas, and had to be pulled up.

"Not Dr. Symonds?"

"No. Dr. Symonds retired lately. He has left Dulveriford. Everybody was so sorry to lose him. Dr. Ingram is a very

clever man. They say he is too clever for the country, and he only came on account of his wife's health; and, poor thing, she died soon after. But we don't know him well yet. And perhaps—"

Ideas failing anew, her eyes fell upon the boy, standing shyly close to the General's knee.

"Is that a nephew of yours?"

"I have no nephews. He has been in my charge." The General spoke solemnly, an underground rumble echoing in his deep-toned voice. There is always something impressive in a voice of that description; and it is particularly well adapted for the carrying of bad news.

"I see. How kind! But you bring me news of my brother? Dearest Theodore!" she ejaculated, clasping her hands. Sybella could not help an occasional air of sentimentality. It was natural to her; or, if acquired, it had become second nature.

"Yes—"

"He is—I suppose we are to expect him by the date he named. How unfortunate that you had to come first!"

No reply.

"I am so looking forward to his arrival. More than words can express! Dear Theodore!" sighed Miss Devereux. "Ten long years since I saw him last! Will he be much changed?"

The General muttered something incoherent under his moustache.

Miss Devereux unclasped her hands, and clasped them anew.

"If only dear Theodore could have resolved to come home a year or two earlier! I never could think why he would not. Keeping that poor little Cyril out all this time—it really has been reckless. Nearly ten years old! Enough to ruin the child's constitution."

"Particularly healthy station," murmured General Villiers.

"Yes, but the native surroundings—I have always heard that the evil was so great—"

"It has been guarded against."

The boy pressed closer to the General's knee, his tiny hand stealing into the veteran's brown fingers.

"They would do all they could, of course. But since poor Olave's death, how could Theodore have time?—A busy civilian, you know. I am afraid it has been a mistake. And dear Evelyn all these years at school, never seeing her parents or brother! Ten years' separation! It cannot be right! Yes, she spent her holidays here—at first, always. She has had a great many invitations of late from schoolfellows, which she seemed to prefer. My dear aunt has been pained, but Evelyn asked her father's consent. I have not seen the dear girl now for eighteen months. Last summer, she went abroad with friends, and last Christmas she had German measles, so my dear aunt was afraid of the infection for me."

This had no ludicrous sound for Sybella's ears. Though close upon forty, she was so used still to being cared for as if she were a maiden in her teens, so used to have her health

counted a prime consideration, that the statement came as a matter of course.

If the General had been less sad, he might have found it hard to restrain a smile.

"It will be all right now, however—now that our dear Theodore is coming home, I shall be so glad to have his advice and help. My dear aunt has always seen to everything, and I am so inexperienced."

"Could I help you?" asked the General. He had something to say which he did not know how to say. With the moral cowardice of many a physically brave man, he was willing to put off the evil moment.

"Would you not mind?" Sybella hesitated, recollecting that here was another widower. But he had come to her; she would not have to go to him; and he was an old family friend.

"Would you really not mind? There is a letter from my brother's lawyer which I cannot understand. Something about investments. He uses such odd phrases. And a cheque has come, which I sent to the Bank, and they would not change it. They said it was not endorsed. Pearce says that means writing one's name at the back. I have had to do it before, but I never can remember if I ought to write across or lengthways, and at which end."

General Villiers solved this knotty point, and glanced at the lawyer's letter.

"Nothing of importance," he said. "I will explain it by-and-by. I must not delay longer—speaking. I have brought you sad news."

Sybella looked inquiring. General Villiers drew the child forward.

"Can you see no likeness?"

The boy turned his face towards her—a fragile colourless face, with violet eyes so dark as to be almost black, and a mass of brown hair curling thickly over the little head.

"Sweet child!" murmured Sybella. Then, with a start, "Yes, I do see! Surely! He is like poor Olave—strangely like. Hers was such uncommon beauty. Dear little boy. He must be a nephew—but Olave had no brothers or sisters. You don't mean—it can't be that he—"

"Cyril, kiss your aunt."

Cyril crossed the short space between, and flung his arms around Miss Devereux with a short sob, as if his heart were full.

"My dear boy! You sweet child!" exclaimed Sybella, embracing him with effusion. "Then this is our precious Cyril, and Theodore has come home. Why has he stayed behind? Is he not well? Tired with travelling? Cyril, my pet, don't cry. Oh, pray don't. Is he hungry? What can I get for him? Some seed-cake? Dear little boy! Why, Cyril, who would ever guess you to be more than seven years old? Such a tiny mite!"

The child pressed his face into her shoulder, and General Villiers spoke slowly—

"Your brother was breaking down fast. The doctors said our only hope was to get him away at once. It made no difference to me, for I was waiting to come with him. He

would not let me telegraph word of our changed plans, for his wish was to surprise you."

"And—" Sybella said.

"For a day or two on board, he seemed to rally, but it did not last."

"And—" repeated Sybella.

The General bent his head.

"This is now Sir Cyril Devereux!" he said.

CHAPTER II.

TAKING SHAPE.

"Follow light and do the right—for man can half control
his doom—

Till you find the deathless angel, seated in the vacant
tomb."

ENNYSON.

T

JEAN TREVELYAN stood at the gate of the Rectory kitchen-garden, gazing down the lane.

She was an only child, about nine years old, of tall and slim make, with a straight back and a well-balanced head. The face was oval, but too thin for prettiness; indeed, nobody called Jean pretty. She had a pale complexion, light hair cut short like a boy's, and odd greenish-brown eyes, in sunshine yellowish like a topaz, and capable of expression to any degree. Jean wore a loose brown holland frock, and held in one hand a brown hat, round the crown of which a brown ribbon was tied. Simplicity could not further go.

"Oswald!" she cried.

No answer came.

Jean waited patiently for some seconds, a hungry look in her eyes. Then she called again:

"Oswald! Os-wald! I'm here!"

A figure emerged from the gooseberry bushes, where it had been stooping out of sight.

"What are you making that noise for, Jean?"

"I want Oswald, aunt Marie."

"Well, you must have patience. He will come in good time."

The tone was not unkind; it was only indifferent. Mrs. or Madame Collier was not a person to enter into a child's desires.

Jean had no mother. She could barely remember her mother. Mrs. Collier, the widowed sister of Mr. Trevelyan,

had lived there almost as far back as Jean's memory could reach, keeping house for her brother, precisely as old Mrs. Willoughby had lived with old Sir John Devereux, keeping house for him since Sybella's infancy. Sybella's complaints of many widowers in the neighbourhood was not without foundation.

Mrs. Collier's real name was Maria. Having married a Frenchman—in virtue of which she was still known as Madame Collier—and having spent her married life abroad, she preferred to be called 'Marie.' She was perhaps some five years older than Sybella, with the air of twenty years' seniority. She was angular in make, with high cheek-bones, marked feature, iron-grey hair, and permanent sunburn. Moreover, she wore caps indoors and old fashioned bonnets out of doors. She could occasionally appear en grande tenue; yet her usual attire was a very embodiment of plainness. At this moment, she had on a rusty black alpaca, frayed at the edges; a big crochet shawl, secured in front by a skewer-like pin; and an enormous garden hat of untrimmed straw, reminiscence of foreign life.

Marie Collier had been tossed early upon her own feet, and forced to stand alone, if she would stand at all. This was bracing, to begin with! Probably she could never, under any conditions, have been turned into a helpless young (?) lady of thirty-nine, unable to endorse a cheque, but no doubt a somewhat different creature might under differing influences have emerged from the chrysalis stage of existence.

The Trevelyan nature was one which needed softening, since it stiffened easily; and softening influences had not in her case been abundant. Both her early life and her married life had been to a great extent hardening.

In some measure the same conditions surrounded the little Jean. There were barriers of repression, of non-comprehension, of outward coldness, fencing her in. But Jean was an Ingram as well as a Trevelyan. She had inherited from the two families a jumble of opposite characteristics. There was all the Trevelyan pride, with any amount of Ingram tenderness. There was the Trevelyan reserve, with the Ingram craving for sympathy. There was the Trevelyan hauteur, with the Ingram shyness. There was the Trevelyan disdain, with the Ingram susceptibility. There was all the force of the Trevelyan will, and with that there were odd touches of the Ingram readiness to yield.

Here was the rough ore of the nature, out of which the future character had to be formed. The main question was—which of the opposing elements would be fostered, which would be crushed or starved out of existence? A child of nine has begun to take shape, but the materials are soft, and malleable by a touch.

Jean did not call again, after her aunt's rebuke. She stood and watched with craving eyes, into which a look of loneliness had crept. Jean was always lonely when not with her brother Oswald. She loved Oswald with an absorbing devotion.

He had rushed away, "promising faithfully" to return in five minutes for a game of bowls. The five minutes were long past, and he had not come. Lesson-time was drawing near. In forty minutes Madame Collier, with inexorable punctuality, would summon Jean to the dingy schoolroom, where she daily spent five hours of misery. These were the first days of Oswald's midsummer holidays—old style, meaning real midsummer;—but Jean, learning at home, was not supposed to need holidays.

"Marie!" another voice called: a man's voice now.

"Yes," Madame Collier answered. She straightened herself a second time, and looked towards the house, flushed with stooping.

A gentleman came down the path with vigorous strides. He was of medium height and muscular in build, having strongly marked features. Permanent indentations stamped the brow, and the wide mouth closed habitually into a straight line; while the manner was prompt and resolute. His dress was severely clerical; the coat long.

"Marie, I want a word with you." He did not observe the motionless figure of his little daughter, and Jean was wrapped up in her patient watch. "Bad news from The Brow."

Dulveriford commonly spoke of Sybella's home as "The Brow" rather than by its full name of "Ripley Brow." The curtailment saved trouble.

Madame Collier forgot Jean, or she would have sent the child out of hearing. It was a principle with that excellent lady that children should never hear aught beyond what directly concerns themselves.

"Bad news!" she repeated, grasping with both hands her basket of gooseberries. "Mrs. Willoughby worse?"

"Not materially. I suppose it to be merely a question of weeks with her; but I do not know that she is worse to-day than yesterday. The news is from abroad. Sir Theodore is dead!"

"You don't say so! Dear me!" Madame Collier adjusted the big white skewer in her shawl, thereby showing that her

feelings were not deeply stirred. "Dear, how unfortunate! But I never liked the accounts of his state."

"General Villiers arrived yesterday, bringing the boy."

"Well—" in a tone of consent to what could not be helped.
"I suppose the General will be the children's guardian."

"No. That is the strange part of the matter—General Villiers is one of the trustees. Miss Devereux is sole guardian—"

Madame Collier's eyes grew round. She set her gooseberry basket down and held up two hands, as if speech failed her.

"Sole guardian to both children. I believe her brother expressed a wish, when dying, that she would appeal to General Villiers for advice."

"She will need advice from somebody! Of all incompetent women—! Well—! I should as soon have expected—!"

"Sir Theodore has always been fond of his sister. He used to say there was plenty of natural capacity, if only it had opportunity to develop."

"Too late now! When a woman is going on for fifty, she can't be remade."

"Miss Devereux is a good way off from fifty."

"O, I know!" with a shrug of her angular shoulders.
"Juvenile bonnets and ribbons can't throw dust in my eyes!
You men are so easily taken in."

Madame Collier's glance fell on Jean, with a twinge of vexation at having said so much, and of consequent displeasure at Jean's presence.

"What are you doing there, Jean? Wasting your time!"

"I'm waiting for Oswald."

"Where is Oswald?" demanded Mr. Trevelyan.

"I don't know, father."

"Then why wait?" Mr. Trevelyan's manner was not stern; it was only repressed and repressing. His eyes surveyed her gravely. He might be a most affectionate father—anybody may be anything below the surface!—but the affection was not allowed to appear.

"He said he would come for a game of bowls—presently." Jean carefully abstained from saying "in five minutes," for that would have meant blame to Oswald.

"Go and find him. Don't dawdle about doing nothing."

Jean made an effort at resistance. "I don't know where he is."

"Go and see."

Jean obeyed with a heavy heart. Whichever way she went, Oswald was as likely as not to have taken the opposite road; and while she was absent, he would return to the gate. The one chance of seeing him was to wait there, and that chance was denied her. It was a small disappointment, yet a very real trouble to Jean.

Mr. Trevelyan's word was law, however. Nobody ever thought of evading it; and Jean dared not explain her trouble, for fear of an inquiry into the strict terms of their arrangement.

"I do wonder where Oswald can be," she said sorrowfully.

Jean was too honest, as well as too obedient, to linger about within view of the gate while out of her father's sight. After walking down the lane, however, she climbed a grass bank, whence she could obtain a glimpse of the spot where her hopes were centred. No signs of Oswald!

The most likely place would be down by the river. Devotion to water, indigenous in the English boy, was a marked characteristic of Oswald.

Jean made her way thither by the shortest route, which meant at the last a steep descent. Somewhat higher up, the stream flowed between rocky and overhanging strata, but here the banks were wide apart, leaving space for the water to spread itself out, rippling in a shallow flow over a floor of golden sand.

Evenly placed lay the stepping-stones, square and large, reaching to the other side. Except in occasional flood-times, an easy mode of crossing was provided thereby. Jean thought so little of running over, that she would have done it in the dark, if required, without a moment's hesitation.

A glimpse of the narrowing banks above could be obtained from the stepping-stone level. This Ripley Gorge, locally known as "The V-Gorge," was counted worth seeing by many who were conversant with Swiss scenery. One arm of the V began not far from the stepping-stones; and near the point of the V was the heaved-up rock promontory—like a coast-headland, only no sea washed its base—popularly called "The Brow."

The small Devereux property, bounded on one side by this precipice, had from it and The Gorge combined the title of "Ripley Brow;" and village colloquialism had rendered "Up at

the Brow" no less descriptive of the house than of the actual promontory.

Jean raced down the slippery grass at a reckless pace, which yet was not reckless, since she was sure-footed as a goat. To follow the zigzag would have been in her eyes a dire waste of time.

Nearing the bottom, she found to her supreme delight an open penknife lying on the ground—Oswald's! Then he had come this way, and she would find him. Jean's heart leaped as she secured the knife. In that moment she heard a plaintive utterance—

"Oh! O please! Please!—O please! O come!"

Not Oswald's voice! Jean dashed downward faster still. Child as she was, she already had the instinct of helping others, more or less the gift of all purer natures.

"O please! O come!" wailed the frightened tones.

Jean reached the level belt beside the river, where a ghost of a path might be found amid coarse grass and weeds. A rough but easy descent led thence to the stepping-stones. On one of the stones, near the middle of the stream, sat a small boy, lifting up a thin and high-pitched voice of dire tribulation.

"Why, what's the matter?" cried Jean.

The sobbing lessened, but the boy did not move. Jean cleared the lower bank at a run, and tripped over the stones till she reached him.

"What's the matter?" she repeated.

"I can't get on. I'm afraid," moaned the depressed little mortal.

"There's nothing to hurt. If you fell in, you couldn't hurt. Afraid! You—a boy!" said Jean, with infinite disdain.

She had been trained to look with contempt upon cowardice, especially a boy's cowardice. Oswald never showed fear; and Oswald was her hero.

But the tender and pitying side of her nature asserted itself, when she looked at the little fellow's white cheeks; not pale only, but dead-white, as with abject terror; and at the small shaking hands.

"Come!" she said gently. "I'll take care of you. I won't let you slip. Stand up, and hold me tight. I'll take you across."

She put a protecting arm round him, and guided his steps with a mother-like care, droll yet pretty in one so young. Jean had all the instincts of womanhood, though her recollections of a mother's love were dim.

"There!" she said, as they reached the bank on the Rectory side.

His face having been turned that way, Jean had taken it for granted that he wished to cross.

"Now you are all right. You see how easy the stones are, so you won't be frightened again. Boys never ought to be afraid. Oswald isn't!" proudly, with a gleam in her greenish-brown eyes. "But you are such a mite! Where do you want to go?"

"I want to go home," came plaintively in answer.

Jean stood looking at him. He was a lovely little boy, but Jean had hardly reached an age appreciative of mere beauty. The sweet wistful eyes and delicate outlines were lost upon her. Jean's notion of a boy was of something reckless, dashing, untidy, headlong, noisy—of Oswald, in fact. This dainty small creature, with lace collar and spotless hands, by no means answered to the description.

"Where is your home?"

"Over there."

"Where? What—'The Brow!' Why, what's your name?"

"I'm Cyril John Devereux."

A pause of astonishment.

"And I'm Jean Trevelyan. But you're not—Cyril!" said Jean.
"Aunt Marie said Cyril was ten years old."

"I'm ten next August."

"Ten! Stand up—straight."

Cyril obeyed.

Jean placed herself beside him, shoulder to shoulder.

"I'm ever so much the tallest—and only nine last month."

"Ah, but I shall grow," said Cyril confidently. "I'm going to be a man."

"A man!" Jean looked him all over again, disdainful and compassionate. "What a pity you weren't made a girl!"

"Father liked me best to be a boy," asserted Cyril.

Jean suddenly remembered his father's death, and as suddenly she recalled the game of bowls.

"Oh, I can't wait. I'm forgetting," she cried. "I must find Oswald."

"Aunt Sybella said there was a boy called Oswald."

"He's my brother!" proudly again.

"Is he nice? Is he like you?" The violet eyes were fixed upon Jean with unspeakable admiration.

"Nice! There never was such a boy as Oswald in all the world—never!" declared the little sister, her soul shining in her face. "No, he isn't like me. Oh, of course not! I'm ugly; and he is—Oh, you don't know Oswald yet! Wait till you do! He is—he is—just Oswald!" cried Jean rapturously, as if the name implied everything.

"You're not ugly."

"Yes, I am. Everybody says so. It doesn't matter. I've got Oswald."

"Shall I like him?"

"I shouldn't like you, if you didn't."

Cyril looked thoughtful.

Jean was longing to be off; but a sense of this little fellow's helplessness restrained her.

"Where do you mean to go?" she asked.

"I don't know the way back."

"Why, over the stones, of course—as you came."

"Oh, I can't. I couldn't go across again—it frightened me."

"But you're a boy. You ought not to be frightened. Oswald never is."

Cyril glanced at the river and shivered, tears filling his eyes.
"I can't," he said.

A whoop rang out, and Jean's contemplative face changed to one of delight.

"Oswald!" passed her lips, as a boy came rushing along the grass-grown path beside the river.

A genuine boy this time—strong and vigorous, hot and muddy, round-faced and rosy, nearly twice the size of the little baronet, though only two years or so his senior. His complexion was sunburnt, his hands were soiled, the cap was slipping off his tumbled hair, the trousers were torn at his knees.

"Hallo, Jean! Did you think I was lost? I say—what shrimp have you fished up there?"

Jean sprang to meet her brother.

"It's Cyril Devereux," she whispered energetically. "He's come home, and his father is dead, and he's afraid of the stepping-stones."

"Whew!" Oswald contented himself with this brief commentary. "Well, come along; just time for a game of bowls."

Jean was nearly torn in half, between the pulling of her own desires on the one hand, and the pulling of duty on the other hand. Her whole soul was bent upon the promised game with the brother whom her little heart worshipped. But this poor small baronet, with his dread of the river, how could he ever find his way home?

It was one of those everyday occasions, when the child's decision one way or the other, does much towards the formation of that child's character. Either the bent towards right, the devotion to duty—the Pflichttreue—is strengthened, and the passion of self-pleasing is weakened; or vice versa.

Jean was sorely tempted; but her home training from babyhood had aimed to teach her one thing—always to do the Right, irrespective of cost to self. Such early training is an untold power for after-good. Every time the will conquers, it gains strength; every time it is overcome, it loses strength. Mere habit, one way or the other, has the compelling force of iron bands in later life. These bands were already in process of formation; and Jean did not hesitate long.

"I can't," she said; "he doesn't know the way round by the bridge. I must show him."

"Rubbish! A boy not able to find his way!"

"He isn't like most boys. He is so—funny!" Jean said, lowering her voice. "So little!"

"Little goose! Time he should learn to be like other boys."

Jean was silent.

"Well, you needn't ask me to come back for a game with you another day! That's all."

Jean's heart was ready to break under his displeasure, yet she stood to her duty.

"I'll make haste," she tried to say.

"Make haste to lessons, you mean! Stuff! Well—will you come?"

"I can't," she murmured.

"Then you're an ass! I shan't play with you again."

Oswald dashed off in a huff, and Jean's eyes were full.

She turned to the other child:

"Come," she said huskily, "we've got to make haste."

"Was that boy cross with you?" demanded Cyril, as they set off. He clenched his tiny hand, and the blue eyes sparkled. "If anybody is cross with you, I'd like—I'd like to fight him."

"No, you wouldn't! He is my brother. You are never to fight Oswald."

"But I will, if he is cross to you."

"It doesn't matter. He is only sorry I can't play. And so am I," added Jean, her chest heaving. "You must learn to get over those stones, you know. Boys never ought to be cowards."

Cyril looked up gravely.

"No, I won't," he said. "Father wouldn't like me to be a coward. I'll try to get over the stones all alone—some day."

CHAPTER III.

"DEAR AUNT."

"Though man a thinking being is defined,
Few use the grand prerogative of mind;
How few think justly of the thinking few!
How many never think, who think they do!
Opinion, therefore—such our mental dearth—
Depends on mere locality or birth."

JANE TAYLOR.

"EVELYN!"

"Yes, aunt."

"Where are you going?"

"Into the garden."

"My dear, you have thin shoes on."

"Thick enough for August."

"No, indeed. The dew was quite heavy last night. And I heard you cough yesterday."

"Cough! I don't know what it is to take cold."

Sybella's brow puckered. "Really, Evelyn, that is childish. Everybody takes cold sometimes."

"I don't."

"My dear, I cannot let you risk it. I really cannot. And, besides—"

"Yes?" Evelyn stood, careless and graceful, outside the French window of the morning-room. She was a marvellously fair young creature; but the fringed black-blue eyes, like those of her little brother in shape and colour, wore a combative expression, as they met the anxious orbs of Sybella.

"My dear, I wished—I thought I had made you understand—I should like you to give up an hour or two every morning—two hours it ought to be—to some useful occupation. Dear aunt always insisted on that with me, when I was long past your age."

Miss Devereux sighed, and her voice grew plaintive. She, like Evelyn, wore heavy mourning, not alone for Sir Theodore, but also for old Mrs. Willoughby, who had passed away within a week of General Villiers' arrival, having never so much as heard of her nephew's death.

Two months had elapsed since then. Sybella stood alone in the world, so far as her accustomed props were concerned, but with a fresh and absorbing interest in life. She had the

children to care for. Sir Theodore had appointed her sole guardian of Evelyn and Cyril Devereux.

It was an interest which brought weighty responsibilities in its train.

"The children—" there was the rub! If it had but been only "the child!" Miss Devereux' whole heart went out from the first towards the gentle boy, who was always ready to respond to her caresses, always eager to give love for love. Every day the fascination grew upon her. From early morning till late at night her one idea was "Cyril." She dressed him in the daintiest garments compatible with mourning; she cultivated each curl and wave of his brown hair; she revelled in her new charge.

Cyril might undoubtedly be considered old enough for school. All the world agreed on this point. But Sybella had a mortal aversion to schools, diligently instilled into her by Sir John Devereux and Mrs. Willoughby, through the best part of her forty years. What they had thought, she continued to think, and if she lacked decision on many points, she knew her own mind here.

She displayed a sudden resolution which took people by surprise. School for Cyril! That little delicate darling to be knocked about by a horde of great rough boys! It would be the death of him! For once Sybella was determined, asking no advice. She would go in for any amount of advice on matters unimportant, but in this case she declined counsel, having her aunt's strong opinion to serve as a guide.

General Villiers reasoned in vain; friends lifted their eyebrows in vain. Sybella would teach the precious boy herself for the present, till he had rallied from the weakening effects of the Indian climate; and then—well,

then she would consider. A tutor, perhaps, or even a day-school. Time enough for that. Miss Devereux was beginning to be conscious of her own power, and to resent what looked like interference with a guardian's prerogatives.

There might be no difficulty as to the actual lessons. Sybella, though not mentally gifted, had had a good education; and Latin was easily to be procured. But there was the question of boyish games, of boyish companionship; not to speak of the perils of over-petting and spoiling.

Miss Devereux was afflicted with a mortal horror of cold, of damp, of east winds, of draughts, of wet feet, of unwholesome food, of over-exertion. She did her best to instil this compound horror into her young charge. She watched and discussed everything that found its way into the baronet's pretty mouth. She examined the weathercock each day, before allowing him to go out. She tenderly consulted his looks and symptoms.

Sir Cyril was a most responsive little boy. He had always been delicate, and he was used to anxious petting. There were no struggles between the two. Miss Devereux found him malleable as wax in her hands. His sweet grave sayings, his trained politeness, his un-childlike understanding of some things, combined with a more than childlike timidity, his love of Bible stories, his readiness to be taught, his affectionate clinging to herself—all these were in Sybella's eyes "beautiful." She could not praise him enough to friends.

"The child is heavenly," she said often, with a gush of enthusiasm which made some smile, while others were touched, and yet others hoped that the little baronet "wouldn't be a prig!"

So for the present all went if not wisely at least smoothly, as regarded Cyril. But as regarded Evelyn, matters were far different.

Miss Devereux had sent for her in haste, on receipt of the sad news brought by General Villiers, feeling sure that the poor dear girl must be heartbroken, unable to give thought to lessons.

Evelyn came, though not too willingly. She was not broken-hearted; and anybody less sentimental than Sybella would hardly have expected her to be so, for a father whom she had not seen during ten years. The loss was a loss, and Evelyn knew it; nevertheless she grudged missing the final examination before leaving school.

It had been a settled matter that she should quit school after this term, to join her father either in India or in England.

Now all was changed. Evelyn had to live at Ripley Brow, under the guardianship of an aunt whom she did not love.

For the maiden lady of forty, with her unpractical ways, her pseudo-poetical tastes, her tendency to overstrained sentiment, her generally old fashioned ideas, never had "got on well," as the saying is, with the brilliant yet sensible and practical niece. Miss Devereux was secretly proud of Evelyn, but scarcely fond of her.

Evelyn had learnt before eighteen what Sybella did not learn till after forty—to stand alone. She had not been hardened like Madame Collier, for everybody loved Evelyn, who came within reach of her magic wand; and love is softening. She was accustomed to the worship of her schoolfellows, to the devotion of governesses and friends. It was a matter of course in Evelyn's life that wherever she

went, she should win affection. The one exception among all whom she knew—the one rift in her environment of adulation and love—was Sybella. Evelyn's wand had no power over Sybella; and Sybella was a perpetual irritation to Evelyn.

A stronger contrast could hardly have been found than between this aunt and niece. While Evelyn had not suffered hardening, she had been in a manner both braced and repressed by long years of school-life, with absence of home associations. Her training had been the precise reverse of Sybella's. She had developed under it rapidly; and few could believe her to be still not eighteen.

Sybella might have belonged to two generations earlier. Evelyn was a thoroughly modern girl; cool, self-possessed, independent, at her ease, afraid neither to speak nor to act, yet always entirely ladylike. Sybella was alarmed at her own shadow, frightened as to proprieties, seldom sure what she wished, rarely certain of her next step, and direfully in need of props.

Side by side with all this, however, Miss Devereux had distinct notions of subordination for young girls and of her own rights. She looked upon seventeen as scarcely past infancy, with need still for leading reins. "When I was seventeen—" settled the question. Evelyn, on the contrary, regarded herself as emancipated from all save a light authority, and well capable of judging in minor matters.

It was almost impossible that these two minds, brought together, should not suffer friction, each exciting the other.

Sybella had been brought up from infancy on a rigid and limited selection of doctrines, carefully expressed; and it had never so much as occurred to her that further truths

might exist beyond the boundary of the said selection. Her ideas on religious subjects were petrified into a permanent shape; that shape which had been handed to her ready-made in childhood; and whatever did not fit into the said shape, like a pudding into a bowl, was at once rejected. The vigorous though narrow mind of the older lady had entirely formulated the niece's belief. What Sybella had received in early youth she had as a matter of course swallowed whole unhesitatingly; and she continued to hold the same unquestioningly.

Of reasons for accepting this or rejecting that, she cared little and knew less. Discussions terrified her, historical facts were "dangerous," and from "evidences," she fled in alarm. She believed what she believed because she believed it; and because she believed it anybody who did not believe it was in error.

The niece was again in these matters a contrast to her aunt, unable to look upon things from Sybella's standpoint. She had early worked her way to a disdain of mere party oppositions on religious questions; and her young wide awake mind, eager with the spirit of the age to dive below the surface, and to know the why and wherefore of things, was perpetually fretted by Miss Devereux's illogical fears and unreasoning positiveness.

Troubles were fast springing up between them. The Devereux household always went to St. John's Church, Dutton—not to Dulveriford Church—always had done so, and as a matter of course, always would. The Devereux household was traditionally extremely "Low" in its views; and the successive Dulveriford clergy had long been more or less "High"; therefore like oil and water, they flowed apart, failing to mingle. Moreover, Mr. Trevelyan's predecessor had been personally obnoxious to Mrs.

Willoughby; and Mr. Trevelyan, stepping into his place, had small chance of pleasing her. To be obnoxious to Mrs. Willoughby was to be obnoxious to the family. If easy-going old Sir John spoke a pleasant word now and then to his Rector, he did it sub rosa, concealing the delinquency from his sister. Sybella, indoctrinated from infancy with her aunt's notions, counted no condemnation too strong for the doings of "that man." Had not "dear aunt" always "strongly disapproved" of him?

But Evelyn counted St. John's architecturally ugly, and she found Mr. Kennedy prosy. His mild "comforting" sermons, which delighted the hearts of the middle-aged ladies and elderly gentlemen of the congregation, had only a soporific effect upon Evelyn. Her cultivated musical taste, repelled by the tuneless shouting of St. John's, was attracted by the well-trained choir of Dulveriford.

The next step was a warm liking on her part for Mr. Trevelyan, and a girlish readiness to submit herself to his teaching. How much of this preference sprang from a spirit of opposition, it would be hard to say. No doubt it was real of its kind.

Miss Devereux could not prevent the personal acquaintance. The two families had lived too long in close neighbourhood to be strangers; and, so far as his connections went, Mr. Trevelyan might be counted unexceptionable. Mrs. Willoughby had, however, always strenuously resisted the growth of acquaintanceship into friendship; and Sybella set herself to do the same. Thereby, at once, she enhanced the value of the friendship to Evelyn.

There were bones of contention enough between them, without this in addition. Whatever the one thought, the

other did not think, on every conceivable subject, from questions of Church and State, down to the quilling of a frill.

Sybella's incessant quoting of Mrs. Willoughby provoked Evelyn. She did not see what it had to do with her occupations, or why she needed to follow certain rules, merely because Sybella had followed them at her age.

"I don't intend to pass my days uselessly," she answered.

"But some regular plan—Indeed, I assure you, it is really necessary for young girls. Dear aunt always said—"

Evelyn's involuntary movement was like that of a high-mettled horse, akin to a shake of the mane, with a backward step, as if in retreat.

"Wait a moment. Pray do not be so impatient, Evelyn. It is necessary that I should sometimes speak; and you ought not to be annoyed. It is—" plaintively, "only for your good."

"Well?" in a questioning tone.

"There is one thing I must mention. I am sorry, but it is my positive duty to—otherwise I would—if I am not misinformed, you went yesterday—I have reason to believe that you were at the Rectory—that you called there."

"Yes."

"It was not necessary—so soon. Only last week, and again yesterday! I thought had made this clear to you, but I seem to have failed. I must speak more plainly. I do not wish to complain, but, once for all, pray remember that I object to

any intimacy in that direction. I have said this before, and it seems to have had no effect. You must please to recollect. An occasional call is all very well, but not oftener than is necessary."

"Why not?"

"We have never been intimate with the Trevelyan's, and I do not intend to be. I could not allow it. Dear aunt very much disapproved of certain things—of Mr. Trevelyan's opinions, and—Pray listen to me, Evelyn. You need not look so impatient. He holds most erroneous views about—and at one time dear aunt found him most unpleasant—"

"Erroneous views about what?"

"I see no necessity for explaining more. You are a mere child still, and cannot enter into these questions. Only you must understand that I should not think of allowing any intimacy. It is out of the question—and I expect strict obedience in the future." Sybella was becoming agitated, and she twirled her hands nervously. "Dear aunt would have said the same, and I am sure, if she had ever thought—My dear, pray listen to me."

"I am listening. I cannot say that I understand. The Trevelyan's seem to me the nicest people about here."

"That is all perversity, Evelyn. You do not really know anything of them. They are well-connected, but as for manner—! It is out of the question that anybody should think Mr. Trevelyan attractive. And as for Mme. Collier—!" Sybella's tone spoke the very quintessence of contempt.

"She is odd, but I like her. I like her immensely. She is so genuine. And Jean fascinates me. And Mr. Trevelyan is the best—the most really truly good man I ever came across. I

could listen to his sermons for hours. Of course I have only heard him two or three times—I have not been to Dulveriford Church since you said I must not. But one very soon knows what does one good. I like even his queer dry manner. He is different from everybody else, and that is so refreshing."

"You are saying all this to vex me, of course," quavered Sybella, reddening. "Just because you know how I feel. Go to Dulveriford Church! I should think not indeed!—From Ripley Brow at all events! And I expect the same obedience as to the acquaintance. Just politeness and no more. When, all these years, we have kept so carefully aloof—"

"I don't think one ought to keep aloof from one's Rector. I don't think it is right."

"Really, Evelyn—! But it all comes from your training. I always have felt it a thousand pities that you went to that school. If your dear Papa would have taken our advice—"

"My father was the best judge."

Evelyn made another backward step, which landed her on the lawn—a happy occurrence. It diverted Miss Devereux's attention from the Trevelyans to her pet hobby—health.

"Child! The grass! And your thin shoes!"

Evelyn turned and fled. She could not trust herself to remain longer; but it was a pity that she ran straight across the lawn. The deed looked like defiance.

CHAPTER IV.

SEVERELY SMITTEN.

"She should never have looked at me,
If she meant I should not love her."

R. BROWNING.

SYBELLA'S forehead wrinkled as Evelyn fled, and she sighed pensively.

"I shall have to appeal to General Villiers," she murmured. "He has more influence over the girl than I have. So very wilful and obstinate! It is most melancholy. But she will listen to General Villiers, because he was her father's friend; and he will not approve of such conduct. I must certainly speak to him. He is almost sure to look in by-and-by."

This was true. General Villiers had taken to "looking in" on most days: and undoubtedly he had a strong influence over Evelyn. Sybella thought him most kind and fatherly to the child: only perhaps a little too ready to show how very pretty he thought her.

Sometimes it struck Sybella that he came to the house rather often, all things considered. There were a good many arrangements to be made, and he had constituted himself general adviser and helper: but still—! Now and again this thought would recur, bringing a blush with it. Could he

mean anything particular? General Villiers was only about fifty-five in age, and except for his grey hairs, he did not look so much. He was handsome and gentlemanly; a person of good standing and of considerable wealth. His antecedents were irreproachable. Sybella herself was barely forty. Fifteen years of difference on the right side! What could be more suitable?

Some such ideas floated vaguely through her mind, as she came indoors and sat down. She was not in the least in love with General Villiers; but she was quite ready to fancy herself so, if desirable; and she felt that matters began to look suspicious. That poor dear man might well feel lonely at Dutton Park, with no companion. Sybella woke up at the sound of an "Auntie darling!" to find Cyril by her side.

"Auntie darling, may I go out?" He systematically addressed her thus—to the delight of Sybella, but not at all to the delight of Evelyn. The iteration was apt to grow tiresome.

"Yes, my pet. But you must put on your overshoes, and your coat and necktie. The wind is east."

"Yes, auntie darling."

"And don't go on the grass, or sit down anywhere."

"No, auntie darling."

"You are pale, my sweet. Not a headache, I hope?"

Cyril had to consider. "Just a little wee one, auntie darling."

"Then you must not play in the sun. Walk in the shade; and mind you don't run fast so as to get too hot."

"No, auntie darling."

"If you see Evelyn, don't let her excite you. And if the headache doesn't go soon, you must come in and lie down. Something must have disagreed with you yesterday. Perhaps it was the baked apple. I think you had better have only broth to-day for dinner—and just a little dry toast."

"Yes, auntie darling."

Cyril obeyed the various directions given, so long as he remembered them. He crept about in the shade, like a venerable invalid, till near the river. By that time the fresh air, acting upon so much of a boyish nature as had been allowed to develop in him, overcame the cultivated languor, and he began to run. A bright idea sprang up, and Sybella's cautions vanished.

He had never yet made a second trial of the stepping-stones. He would do it now. Jean had urged him to conquer. He would not be a coward.

There was natural force of will in the boy, though his fond parents had done their best in the past to weaken it; though his doting aunt was now doing her best to carry on the process.

"You don't like so-and-so! Then don't do it, darling!"—had been the manner of his training hitherto. Such treatment is an absolute cruelty to a child, unfitting him for the exigencies of future life. To teach a child to master his own will, to control his own inclinations, is a grand beginning for life. To wrap the will in cotton-wool, and slay its vitality through disuse, means often a terrible after-slavery to the inclinations. "If I like!" becomes the rule of action in place of "If I ought!"

Cyril had enough of latent vigour to prevent his succumbing utterly to even Sybella's training. As yet, however, he was

very young for his age; small, timid, almost babyish; and his affectionateness made him the more malleable. The chief bracing influence in his little life was Jean Trevelyan. Oswald frightened him; and he shrank from Evelyn's high spirit; but he was ready to do or bear anything for Jean.

So he made the effort bravely, though his heart fluttered, and dire sickness crept over him, as the waters ran past. He knew no more than did Jean of the physical weakness which caused these sensations. It was "cowardice" in his eyes as in Jean's; and it had to be conquered, because she said so.

From stone to stone, he struggled on—whitening, shivering, hardly able to hold himself upright, till the middle of the stream was reached. Then he could do no more. Water and banks swept round with dizzy whirl, and as he crouched down in a forlorn little heap, he seemed to be sinking through unfathomable depths. He would not cry this time, for Jean despised boyish tears, but further advance was not possible.

"Hallo! What's wrong?"

It was a man's voice, full and musical; a voice unknown to Cyril. A few strides brought the owner of the voice near, and Cyril was lifted in a pair of strong arms, to be carried the rest of the way.

"What's the matter, you poor little chap?"

Cyril burst into tears. "Oh, I did want to get over," he sobbed, "and I couldn't; and Jean—Jean—"

"What about Jean?"

"Jean says—says—it's so cowardly—and she won't—won't love me!"

"What's cowardly?"

"I can't get across the stones."

"Turns you giddy, eh?"

"Yes," sobbed Cyril, from the depths of his heart.

"Never mind. I wouldn't cry. When I was a little fellow like you, I was just the same—every inch as bad; and you see I don't mine the stones now."

Cyril was wonderfully comforted. Tears lessened, and he could manage to look up into the other's face—a young face, frank and kindly; with a mouth of exquisite curves, sweet, strong, and smiling; with a broad forehead above the grey eyes, which were full, half of mockery, half of tenderness, a touch of sadness running through both.

"Please put me down," entreated Cyril, direfully afraid of seeming girlish.

The young man obeyed very gently, as if he were handling a piece of porcelain. There was something porcelain-like in the child's look. Cyril tottered, and caught at his new friend.

"Dizzy still, poor little man? Sit on this bank."

"I mustn't. Auntie says the grass is damp to-day. And I promised."

"Whew! Quite right to do as you are told. Well; you won't find me damp. I'll be your cushion."

He threw himself down, lifted Cyril on his knee, and encircled the child with kind arms. Cyril rested his curly head on the broad shoulder, with evident relief.

"That's better, eh? Now tell me your name. Cyril! What—little Devereux? I know all about you. And is Jean a friend of yours?"

"Jean? O yes! I do love her so."

Pretty, but hardly boy-like, the young man thought.

"She's a jolly little girl, isn't she?"

"Do you know Jean?"—with great eagerness.

"Rather! I should think so! Hasn't she ever talked to you about Cousin Jem? If not, I'll pay her out."

The mocking grey eyes sparkled, then grew soft as they glanced down on Cyril's tiny white hand. Jem's oppositions of mood were almost as marked as those of Jean.

"O yes; I know. Jean told me. She said Cousin Jem was a sort of a cousin. And she likes him—you, I mean—ever so much. Next after Oswald, you know. And I think I shall like you next after Jean. And Evie said you were coming to stay with General Villiers. But—" with an elderly air—"I didn't know it was you, of course, at first: because Evie called you a boy."

Cyril was regarding, in his turn, the muscular brown hand beside his own, a hand of aristocratic outlines and powerful grasp, matching well the lithe muscular figure.

"Evie calls everybody boys."

"Does she? Who is Evie?"

"Oh, she's my sister. She's so pretty. I love Evie; only not like Jean." A pause, as if for reflection. "I mean to marry

Jean, some day."

"Ah!" said Jem. "Have you told her so?"

"O no!" Cyril's voice had a sound of indignant surprise. "I haven't told anybody."

"Except me!" Jem Trevelyan was used to this. He had the indescribable power over all who came in contact with him, which causes unlimited confiding. Young as he was, other people were perpetually telling him things which they "had told nobody else." He never knew why: neither did they: but in a tête-à-tête with Jem, secrets were sure to ooze out; and Jem never abused anybody's trust.

"You won't tell Jean!"

"Not a word. You needn't be afraid. I wouldn't advise you to tell Jean either. Many a lady is lost through the gentleman speaking too soon." Jem stated this as seriously as if he had been addressing a full-grown man; and indeed the little fellow's intense seriousness hardly admitted of a joke. "Wait a while."

"How long?"

"Oh, wait—let me see—how old are you?"

"I'm just ten."

"Well, you must wait ten or twelve years at the very least. Perhaps more. Never do to speak sooner."

"Jacob waited fourteen years."

"So he did." Jem mentally contrasted the patriarch with this dainty infant, and had difficulty in keeping his lips straight.

"If you have to wait fourteen years, it's nothing. Just bring you to twenty-four."

"And then I'll marry Jean."

"Supposing Jean consents. There's that little point to be considered. I'll tell you one thing—Jean will never marry a man to whom she can't look up. Do you understand? You must grow into a real man before you speak—strong and brave and good—a man she can respect and lean upon, not a twopence-halfpenny creature in a coat."

The words sank deep; deeper than Jem knew.

"Yes, I will!" said Cyril.

"And don't mind waiting. Don't be easily disheartened, or get into a tiff and throw it up, because she isn't to be had at the first go. If she's worth winning, she's worth waiting for."

Cyril heaved a sigh. Sybella was always giving vent to audible exspirations of air, and the trick is infectious.

"I think Jean is just exactly like Rachel," he said. "Rachel was so beautiful, you know."

Jem's expression became comical. Had he uttered his thought, he would have said, "She's a queer little scarecrow, but she'll improve." Happily he was spared the need for a reply.

"Hallo! There she is! Wait and see if she knows me. We've not met for two years."

Jean advanced slowly, recognising Cyril, and perplexed at his position. Cyril would have struggled up, but for Jem's

grasp. When Jean came near, a flash of light appeared in her eyes.

"Cousin Jem!" she cried.

Jem pulled her down on the grass beside him, and kissed her cheek.

"How d'you do, little one? Can't get up, for I'm acting bolster. Here's somebody in mortal dread of a scolding from you. Tried to get over the stones, and turned giddy."

"Cyril is always frightened," Jean said, with disdain.

"It's not fear. He can't help the dizziness."

Jean looked up in surprise. "Can't he?"

"No. The feeling isn't cowardice. If he caved in, and made up his mind to be beaten, that would be cowardice. But he won't."

"I won't, really and truly, Jean," pleaded Cyril. "I did try so hard."

Jem's hand went with a tender motion over the curly hair. Jean saw and understood, the soft side of her nature springing in response.

"You won't mind some day, Cyril."

"Not he," said Jem. "He'll be as plucky as anything! See if he isn't! You must give him time. Everything isn't easy to everybody, you know. It really is braver of Cyril to get half over, feeling as he does, than for you to run backwards and forwards fifty times. Yes, of course, much braver!"— emphatically. "Because one is hard, and the other isn't."

Mind, Cyril, don't try it alone for a time or two. Take Jean's hand, and try a few stones. Do a little more every day. By-and-by you won't care a rap."

"No, I won't," assented Cyril.

"It's a nasty feeling. I used to be just as bad—got into an awful funk if I had to walk along a board. Had a hard fight too, before I could master it. But it had to be mastered. If I'd given in, and been a slave to that, I should have been a slave to a hundred other fancies as well; and think what a useless fellow I must have grown. Always a bother to myself, and a hindrance to everybody else."

"I won't!" declared the little baronet, with concentrated earnestness.

"That's right. You'll conquer, never fear! Now you're better, eh? Able to stand again? Why!—Who—?"

Jem, otherwise James Trevelyan, sprang to his feet, snatching off his cap.

He had seen pretty girls in his lifetime—any number of them; and his pulse was not wont to beat fast at the sight. They did beat now, furiously. For not many "pretty girls," so called, could match the one coming at this moment across the stones.

She was tall for her age, slight and willow-like in figure. Brown hair clustered thickly about the brow; and dark curled lashes fringed the violet eyes. Other features, if not classically beautiful, were delicate, unobtrusive, and set off by a rare complexion of ivory and pale rose. One ungloved hand held a garden hat, the other guarded a crape-trimmed skirt.

In leisurely style she drew near; not troubling herself to put on the hat; not in the least embarrassed by Jem's bewildered gaze. Evelyn saw it, of course; but admiration was an everyday thing in her life. It came and was accepted, much in the same fashion that sunshine comes and is accepted.

Had admiration failed, Evelyn would have felt the loss. Having it in superabundance, she received it carelessly. While aware of her own exceptional charms, and appreciating the privileges of beauty, she was far less vain, far less occupied with her own looks, than many a girl not one tithe so fair. Evelyn was much more disposed to vanity in respect of her mental gifts than of her pretty face.

"That's Evie," announced Cyril.

"Who?"

"It's Cyril's sister—Evelyn," said Jean, wondering what had come over "Cousin Jem."

Jem stood motionless, cap off, till Evelyn quitted the last stone. Then he went forward, and offered his help for the ascent of the bank.

"Thanks!" Evelyn said, smiling, and just touching the brown hand. She needed no help, but she was too gracious a being to refuse. "Thanks!" she repeated, reaching the level path, with a kind look at Jem which finished him off completely, though it was no more than she would have given to gardener or butler for a service rendered. "Is anything wrong with Cyril?"

"He turned giddy, crossing the river," said Jem.

"But I'm going to try again, and I mean to do it," exclaimed Cyril. "He says he was just as bad, Evie, and he got over it. And I mean to be brave. Jean says I must."

"Jean says!" repeated Evelyn. It recalled Miss Devereux's perpetual citing of "dear aunt."

"He's a boy," explained Jean.

"And I'll be a man some day," cried the little baronet. "You'll see, Evie. I'll take care of Jean when I'm a man."

"Jean is more likely to take care of you at present."

"That state of things is often reversed later," observed Jem, feeling for once unaccountably shy, and striving after self-possession. He was not given to shyness commonly. "Cyril and I had to perform self-introductions. Jean was our connecting link."

"Then perhaps you are General Villiers' friend?"

"And he isn't a boy," cried Cyril, drowning Jem's assent.

Evelyn did not blush. She said, "No?" and looked straight at Jem with a soft laugh, which put him at his ease, but tightened the strings of fascination.

"I reached Dutton Park last night. General Villiers, is an old friend of some of my family. A delightful man."

The girl's eyes drooped. "He is—I don't know anyone like him!"

"A sort of modern preux-chevalier style."

"And always so gentle."

Jem wondered whether any human being could be otherwise than gentle to Evelyn. He knew little of Miss Devereux.

Evelyn made a move as if to go. "Come, Cyril—" she said; "we will walk round by the bridge. I suppose you have had enough of the stepping-stones for one day."

"There's a prettier path to the Brow up the glen—crossing the rustic bridge," observed Jem. "But of course you know."

"Oh, I know it all. I have spent so many of my holidays here —only not very lately. That is my favourite ramble. But it is supposed to be too lonely for me, with only Cyril; and somehow nobody is ever free to escort us."

"Why, I go alone anywhere," said Jean.

Jem's glance went from the one to the other. "That is different," he remarked; and then he turned again to Evelyn, audacious though embarrassed. "If you would not mind—Jean and I would gladly act escort. The glen is perfect just now. You really ought to see it. I have been the whole round this morning."

"Thanks!" in a considering tone.

"Jean and I are cousins," apologetically. "So I thought—"

"A sort of cousins," corrected Jean, trained in habits of rigid accuracy.

"My father was first cousin to Jean's father, so Jean and I are 'seconds.' It is a convenient tie where people suit; and Jean and I do suit; so perhaps—"

"Perhaps, on the strength of it, we may count ourselves acquainted."

"There is General Villiers as well to vouch for my respectability."

"Ah!"—with a smile.

"Then you really will make use of us! I'll walk behind, if you would rather."

Evelyn laughed. She found the proposal tempting, and could see no harm. "I don't think a rearguard will be needful," she said. "Thanks—if it really is not giving you trouble—"

"Trouble!!" protested Jem.

CHAPTER V.

QUITE TOO UTTERLY.

"A dim Ideal of tender grace
In my soul reigned supreme;
Too noble and too sweet, I thought,
To live, save in a dream—
Within thy heart to-day it lies, and looks on me

from thy dear eyes."

A. A. PROCTER.

THE winding glen in its tangled beauty, far surpassed ordinary English types of scenery. It might almost have served for a Swiss ravine, but for the lack of enclosing mountains; and, indeed, the range of great hills, not many miles away, where the river had its birth, might not inaptly have been called "mountains," at least as an act of courtesy.

Banks, rising on either side of the gorge to a height of two hundred feet and more, were carpeted thickly with moss, decked with ferns, and clothed with trees which descended to the very brink of the swirling stream, there to overhang its surface. The path led through a prolonged bower of foliage, occasional gleams of sunshine creeping through. Gnarled roots projected themselves fantastically; and large flat stones, now high and dry, showed the wash of the water in flood-time.

Cyril grew timid at the nearness of the path to the steep lower bank. He slid his hand into Jean's, and she did not rebuff the appeal, for Jem had taught her a lesson. She put him on the side away from the stream, and held his fingers protectingly.

Jem did not mark this. Usually he saw everything; but his whole attention was given to Evelyn. Her delight with the exquisite tints, the lights and shades of the gorge, was pretty as a study; and it meant more than a study to Jem. She did not use up a vocabulary of adjectives, but the closed lips parted, the violet eyes deepened, the blush-rose tint of her cheeks grew bright. She went slowly—it could not

be too slowly for Jem!—devouring with earnest gaze every detail of light and shadow. Jem was enchain'd with the grace of her movements, the more remarkable from utter absence of self-consciousness. He had never come across any one like her before, though the girls he had known were in number legion.

Still Evelyn said nothing till they reached a wilder part, less shut in. Trees grew scanty, and the rocks were steep and bare, while the stream rushed swiftly through a straitened bed, foaming past with a sweet high note. Then she did say "Oh!" and her eyes went in a swift appeal for sympathy to Jem. Not in the least because he was Jem, but only because in her joy she wanted a response from somebody.

Jem could hardly be expected to understand exactly how things were. He realised only that a new world was opening out before him—a new world in the shape of Evelyn Devereux. If he had not been already taken captive, this one glance would have done the business. Such a pair of great violet eyes, liquid, radiant, fringed all round with even lashes, turned full upon him, as if he, and he alone, could enter into her delight—what chance had he? And yet he was nothing to Evelyn. She would have bestowed the same look upon almost anybody who had happened to stand in his place at the moment. It was simply the natural expression of her pleasure.

Jem was a devotee of Nature commonly; but the sole item of Nature which he had eyes for on this particular day was a human item. The fair scenery of the gorge was lost upon him. He forgot even the presence of the children, and saw only Evelyn.

She had the dumb response she wanted, and went on, thinking no more about him. Jem was content not to talk.

His one wish was to be allowed to walk beside Evelyn indefinitely, watching the play of feeling in her face. But this could not last; and somewhere in his mind, he was counting on five minutes of her free attention, when they should have crossed the rustic bridge, into the path which led away from the gorge, straight to the Ripley Brow grounds. The gorge itself would take a sharp bend just after the bridge, becoming then the second arm or branch of the letter V, and growing for a while even more rugged and wild in character, before it flattened and sobered down.

When, however, the bridge had been crossed, and Jem's hopes were high, a clerical figure could be seen striding down the glen towards them.

"Mr. Trevelyan!" exclaimed Evelyn.

She had taken, as already intimated, a strong girlish fancy to the Rector; and, as also intimated, the fancy was being fed by opposition. Left alone, it might have sunk into insignificance. Stamped upon, it was sure to flourish.

"How do you do?" said Mr. Trevelyan. He had always a curt and rigid manner, but a certain softness crept into his eyes as he bent them on Evelyn; for no man could be grim to Evelyn Devereux.

Jem received a handshake, and a brief, "Heard you were coming."

"Have you been for a walk?" asked Evelyn wistfully.

"On business. Not pleasure. A man ill in cottage."

"And you are going home down the gorge?"

"No; I have another visit to pay beyond your sapling plantation."

"O then you were coming our way; so I need not trouble Mr. Trevelyan any longer. He has been so kindly taking care of us through the glen. Thanks; I am so much obliged to you for coming all this distance," she said, giving her hand to Jem with bewitching graciousness. "It has been lovely."

Jem submitted to her decision with lifted cap, and did not betray the depth of his disappointment. Evelyn would scarcely have seen it, if he had, for she was busied with her new companion.

"Jean, it is nearly time for you to go home," said Mr. Trevelyan, as he turned away.

The tiny baronet, with a parting glance at Jean, trotted in the rear of the retiring two. He was desperately in awe of Mr. Trevelyan, and seldom by choice approached within fifty yards of him; so Evelyn was likely to have what she thoroughly enjoyed, a tête-à-tête talk with the Rector. His characteristic air of dry attention did not repel her, as it would have repelled many girls; and there was nothing small or nagging about his severity. She felt the man to be thoroughly genuine in all he said or did. If the path of duty should lead him through fire and water, he would follow it unhesitatingly. Whatever his faults might be—and faults, of course, he had, being human—self-indulgence was not one of them. Evelyn's keen insight read him truly.

Jem would have given all he possessed, which was not much, to follow Evelyn along the path, and into the "Brow" grounds; no matter at what distance. But gentlemanly feeling rendered this impossible. He stood like a statue,

gazing fixedly till the three had vanished, unconscious of Jean's watchful attention.

"Well—" he said at length, and he made an effort to pull himself together, to awake to common life once more. "Well, Jean?"

"Do you think Evelyn very pretty?" asked Jean, with a child's directness. "Is that why you stare at so?"

Jem felt ruffled. His worst enemy could not lawfully accuse him of anything so objectionable as "staring."

"Rather a rude remark, Jean!"

"I don't mean to be rude. But you did," asserted Jean.

"I beg your pardon! Looking is not staring. A gentleman never stares."

"Do you think her very pretty?" repeated Jean, dropping what she counted an unimportant question.

"Yes. Don't you?"

"Not so much as some people."

Jem was amused. He planted himself with his back against a tree, and scanned curiously the straight supple child.

"Who is prettier than Miss Devereux, among your acquaintances?"

Jean was puzzled. "Miss Devereux isn't pretty. She's too old. Aunt Marie says she is fifty."

"Oh, I see. But I mean Miss Evelyn Devereux. I say, Jean, don't you go about talking Of Miss Devereux as fifty years

old. She wouldn't like it."

"Aunt Marie said so."

"You needn't quote Aunt Marie. Come—who is prettier in your estimation than Miss Evelyn Devereux?"

The answer was delayed. Jean seemed to be weighing the matter. She said at length composedly:

"You!"

Jem did laugh. He had a pleasant musical laugh, round and full like his voice. It rang out now, not loudly but irresistibly. Jem held on to a bough, and bent with his merriment; while his eyes danced, and fairly ran over with tears of fun.

"Jean, you are past everything. It's the best compliment I ever had in my life," cried Jem, nearly convulsed.

"It's true," sturdily answered Jean.

Jem mastered himself, though every muscle in his face was twitching yet.

"Are you sure you don't mean Oswald?"

"Oh no. Oswald says boys are never pretty; only brave. But I think men are pretty sometimes."

"What do you find pretty in me? Eh?"

Jean found response easy. "Your eyes are pretty," she said. "They look so funny. And your mouth is pretty, only you're getting a horrid moustache. And I like the way you do your hair. It's got a nice wave just on the forehead. And you laugh so often. Nobody's pretty that doesn't smile."

"But Miss Evelyn Devereux smiles."

"Oh, not like you."

"What a pity Jean doesn't smile more!"

"I shouldn't be pretty, anyhow."

Jem could not contradict this. He patted her arm.

"Never mind. You are a nice little girl, and I like you. What is to be your next step?"

"Now? I'm going home to lessons."

"Not holidays yet!"

"I don't have holidays. I wish I could. Aunt Marie says they are such waste of time."

"I'll see if I can't beg you off a day or two. Come along! Yes, this minute!"

Jean's face of wondering delight was worth inspection. A passing question slid through Jem's mind—was she so plain, after all? But he did not trouble himself to answer the question. He was longing to get away from everybody, that he might dream over his new vision of beauty. Perhaps not many in his place would have voluntarily put aside the longing, to beg a treat for a child; and he half regretted his own offer the next instant, though he never thought of drawing back. Jem was essentially kind-hearted.

Together they went to the Rectory; and Jem pleaded so successfully that four whole days were granted. This was Friday. Lessons should not begin again till the Thursday following. Jean heard in a maze of silent rapture. Five days

of uninterrupted freedom, counting Sunday! Freedom to devote herself to Oswald!

Jem did a good deal of walking and fishing those days; and a good deal more of dreaming. Whatever else he might have in hand, Evelyn was never out of his mind.

He saw her each day, one way or another. Sometimes it was only a glimpse, of which Evelyn knew nothing. Once they met in the road, and had a little chat. Once General Villiers took him to the Brow for afternoon tea, and Jem was in her presence for an hour. It all meant to Evelyn—nothing. To Jem it meant—everything.

CHAPTER VI.

AN APPEAL AND ITS RESULTS.

"And just because I was thrice as old,
 And our paths in the world diverged so wide,
Each was nought to each, must I be told?
 We were fellow-mortals, nought beside?"

R. BROWNING.

"I CERTAINLY am surprised! I could not have expected such a want of correct feeling!" Miss Devereux spoke in tremulous accents, moving her hands nervously with a washing gesture, one over the other.

Sybella's hands were seldom at rest. Either she was twiddling her chain, or she was drumming the table, or she was going through some other digit-exercises of her own devising. People who have unpretty hands, and do not wish to call attention to them, should refrain from needless gestures. Sybella had not pretty hands, but she was far from following this rule.

Miss Devereux's face was in a flutter, as well as her extremities, and her eyes roved anxiously about. Evelyn's composure made her increasingly nervous.

"I certainly am surprised," she reiterated. "Such an extraordinary thing to do. My dear aunt would have been quite shocked: she would indeed. I am sure, when I was your age, I should as soon have thought of flying as of such an impropriety!"

"Impropriety! To let that boy walk up the glen with us!"

"James Trevelyan is not a boy. You cannot pretend to think him so. He has been through college."

"Twenty-two, is he not? I know he said he could not be ordained for another year."

"Five years older than yourself."

"Ten years younger in mind and character."

"Really Evelyn—"

"And I shall be eighteen in a week."

"Really, Evelyn, if you persist in this sort of thing, I shall have—I shall be compelled to appeal to General Villiers."

Evelyn laughed, but it was easy to see that the threat told.

"Ask General Villiers whether I may walk in the company of a big boy and two children, for fifteen or twenty minutes!"

"Your flippant tone only makes me feel—"

"General Villiers told me yesterday all about young Mr. Trevelyan," said Evelyn. She was not rudely interrupting her aunt. Sybella's sentences were apt to die away unfinished, as ideas or language failed. "He must be a nice lad."

"Mr. Trevelyan may—That has nothing to do with your conduct! Your conscience must convince you how wrongly you are behaving! I shall certainly have to appeal to General Villiers," quavered Sybella.

"General Villiers!" announced Pearce.

With more than usual gravity, the General entered. No doubt he had heard the words last spoken, for Miss Devereux's voice always grew shrill under excitement. She greeted him with a disturbed air, while Evelyn stood in the centre of the room, carrying her head like a young princess.

"I hope nothing has happened," General Villiers said, with his air of polished politeness. He kept Evelyn's hand, scrutinising the unwonted spot of crimson on either cheek. The exceeding kindness of his look was almost too much for her self-control; and tears flushed her eyes.

"Aunt Sybella is vexed," she said. "Your friend, Mr. James Trevelyan, was so good as to walk up the glen with us, the day he arrived. I had been longing to go there, and nobody was ever free to take me. I am told I must not do it alone. He and Jean and Cyril and I were together. Was it so very objectionable?"

General Villiers could not drop the small hand, which seemed to creep into his for protection. He stood looking down upon Evelyn, with mingled sympathy and admiration. Evelyn's lip quivered, and two large tears fell despite all her efforts. She dashed them away with the free hand, as if ashamed.

"Evelyn is of course making the best possible story for herself," complained Miss Devereux. "My dear aunt always trained me to be so very particular—"

"But perhaps—" the General said, taking advantage of a hiatus.

"And Evelyn pays no regard to my wishes. None whatever! I am sorry to have to complain of her, but I feel it to be my duty. My feelings matter little, but there is Evelyn's future—and what may be said of her. I feel that I ought to appeal. It is not the one thing only. I am sure if I could have known what these two months would be—Evelyn running deliberately in the face of my wishes—disregarding my opinions—setting up her own judgment—forming friendships which she knows I must disapprove—disobeying my express commands! And then the temper and annoyance, when I venture to remonstrate. If I had guessed—"

"But about Jem?" said the General.

"When I was Evelyn's age, I am sure I should never have dreamt of such a thing as a walk with a stranger—a young

man!!—absolutely without even an introduction! But then I was so carefully brought up! I could never have stooped to such an act. I would have walked twenty miles round sooner! Such a want of self-respect."

There was a dangerous flash in Evelyn's eyes. "It is you who give the false impression now," she said. "Mr. Trevelyan helped Cyril when he was frightened; and that was an introduction. I knew all about him; and the two children were there. We went up the glen together, all four of us; and as soon as Mr. Trevelyan appeared—our Mr. Trevelyan, I mean—I said good-bye to him. Was that so dreadful?"—her eyes going to General Villiers. "I did want to see the glen again."

"Why did you never ask me to take you, my child?" the General asked naturally. "However—I think Miss Devereux must have misunderstood matters. Now that it is all cleared up, shall we—?"

"I beg your pardon; it is you who do not understand," tartly interrupted Sybella. "But perhaps I had better say no more. Evelyn is bent upon taking her own way. Dear aunt would have been sadly grieved. If Evelyn did not feel herself to be in the wrong, why did she never tell me what she had done? Why did she so studiously conceal it—and no doubt induce her little brother to do the same? Such underhandedness—But I feel it is useless for me to pursue the subject. I have said all that is needful, and I have done. Perhaps, if you are alone with Evelyn, you may induce her to speak the truth. My remonstrances are thrown away."

Miss Devereux's voice was so high-pitched and shaky as to suggest an imminent breakdown. She left the room, and Evelyn's eyes were again full.

"O it is hard—hard to have to live with her," the girl murmured. "I have never had to bear coldness before: Aunt Sybella cannot endure me. Everything I do and say is wrong. Perhaps I ought to have told her of that walk, but I knew she would worry, and it did not seem worthwhile. Sometimes I almost think I must run away—everything is so wretched. She is winning even Cyril from me."

"My poor child!"

"You feel for me, I know," she said, raising her eye frankly, as to a father. "That is my one comfort. If it were not for your kindness—knowing that you understand—I think I should go wild. I cannot tell you what the pressure is, all day long. One is never left in peace, never allowed to have one's own opinion. Everything must be discussed, and aunt Sybella must always prove herself to be in the right. The weariness of that incessant tittle-tattle—what this person says, and what that person thinks. The only being never in the wrong is aunt Sybella! You are not even allowed to differ in silence. You must listen, you must answer, and you must be convinced."

"I don't wonder that you find things trying."

"Oh, if you knew—how trying. I may speak out this once, may I not? You are my father's friend, and she has appealed to you. I have never ventured before. I did not even ask you to take me up the glen, because she is so jealous of any kind word spoken to me. Don't you see how hard it is?—How alone I am? If only I might go back to school! They did love me there."

A sob broke into the words. General Villiers was deeply moved. Evelyn's face did not lose its attractiveness, even under agitation. Her very weeping was controlled, and her

features were not distorted by the muscular expression of distress; but the violet eyes grew pathetic, and large drops fell slowly.

"Two months? They seem like two years to me! How shall I ever bear whole years of it, with no hope of escape? She will never learn to love me."

"She must—in time."

"She will not. I have no power over aunt Sybella. We repel one another at every point. Isn't there a sort of mutual repulsion between certain people?" Evelyn tried to laugh. "I think I shall grow a bad temper here. I never knew that I had one before; but she makes me naughty. Do things lie dormant in us sometimes, till we get into a new atmosphere? Aunt Sybella will be my temper-growing atmosphere, I am afraid. If people love me, and I love them, I can be vexed at nothing. Real love doesn't get vexed, you know. But she—oh, she makes it so hard to be good; so hard to do right."

General Villiers might have whispered patience to the tried young spirit. He might have told her that the very "atmosphere" which threatened to develop a temper ought rather to be the means of developing a spirit of endurance. He might have suggested that one can never learn to bear bravely and Christianly, without having something to bear. He might have reminded her that life and its surroundings are modelled for each individual by ONE who knows that individual's need. But his overwhelming sense of sympathy prevented a dispassionate view of matters.

While feeling for Evelyn, he ought also to have felt for Sybella. The very weakness of character and narrowness of intellect, which made her so trying a companion for Evelyn,

added to her perplexities in dealing with Evelyn. She was much to be pitied for those perplexities, and for the enervating education which had fostered her natural feebleness.

General Villiers could not see Sybella's side. He had eyes only for Evelyn's trouble.

The past two months of constant intercourse with this young girl, fresh from school, had worked a revolution in his being. After long years of widowhood, wherein no thought of marrying again had come to the fore, he found himself passionately in love with a pretty creature, not yet eighteen, a complete child in comparison with himself!

The thing was wild, of course; inconceivable. The idea of marriage could not be cherished for a moment. General Villiers had not cherished it thus far. He had scarcely even admitted to himself that he loved, other than in a fatherly way. Or if at times he allowed the fact, he was resolved to keep his secret, to be only her true and father-like friend, to watch over her life, to guard her so far as he might from sorrow, to find his joy in seeing her happy.

So matters might have gone on indefinitely, but for this scene. General Villiers was a man of peculiarly simple nature, single-eyed and straightforward, but by no means incapable of taking a false step. The very directness of his aims, and the childlike eagerness of his impulses, combined with a certain innate incapacity to look upon both sides of a question, made him the more liable to such a step. Evelyn's distress, her free speech, her instinctive turning to him, broke through his purposes of self-restraint. The love, which had smouldered hitherto, leaped up in a fierce flame, and bore down all barriers. He thought how he might bring her speedy relief; and he did not think how the manner of that

bringing might possibly mean a fresh thraldom. At the moment it seemed to him that for her sake he might speak.

"Evelyn, my little girl," he said, and his manly voice faltered, "if I were but younger! If I were but more fitted! I would give my life for you! I would give all I have to smooth your way! And even as things are—if I could be sure that I ought—"

She seemed perplexed, and said, "I don't understand."

"You are too young—only seventeen! Far too young for an old fellow like me. Yes, I am old compared with you, my child! The discrepancy is far too great. It would be wrong! You are such a child. You cannot know your own mind yet. Still I could give love as strong—stronger, I think, than any mere boy. I do give—but how can I ask your acceptance? It would be a cruelty to your future."

She gazed wistfully into his agitated face.

"I don't quite understand," she repeated. "At least I am not sure. But you are the best and kindest friend I have ever had. Nobody can be to me what you are. And I am not a child. I am just eighteen. I have not been a child for years. They said at school that I grew into a woman long before the right time. I don't care for young people or boys. There is always a want in them. Why should you talk as if there were such a very great difference between you and me? I think age has more to do with mind than body."

The words dropped slowly from her soft rosy lips, each with an intonation of serious thought. General Villiers was swept away by them. He took her hands into his own, kissing again and again the slender fingers.

"My little girl! Can it be true? Will you be mine? Could you make up your mind to marry me, my Evelyn—to let my home be yours?"

"Marry you! Live at Dutton Park!" And her eyes opened wider. Despite her would-be middle-aged manner, she looked inordinately young at that moment, her ivory skin and delicate bloom contrasting with his grizzled locks and developing crow's feet. The innocent surprise was so like a child's pleasure. "Live at Dutton Park!" she said. She did not add—"Get away from aunt Sybella!"—but unquestionably that idea was prominent.

"Would you? Could you? Do you feel that it would be possible?" faltered the General. He could hardly speak, he was so stirred and shaken by the rush of his great love; while she was entirely calm, only surprised and pleased. "My Evelyn! My darling can such joy be?"

"Yes, I will indeed," she answered.

CHAPTER VII.

PREPOSTEROUS!

"What can a young lassie, what shall a young lassie,
What can a young lassie do wi' an auld man?"

R.

BURNS.

"I NEVER heard anything so preposterous in all my life!" declared Madame Collier, in a muffled tone of righteous indignation.

The muffled sound was due to a physical cause, not to a mental condition. Madame Collier was putting a false hem to an old serge skirt of Jean's for lengthening purposes; and the process required a plentiful use of pins. Two or three white points protruded from each corner of her mouth. She wore her huge untrimmed garden hat, having been previously fruit-gathering; and the rusty alpaca was looped up, Dutchwoman-wise, nearly half-way to her knees, displaying ankles formed rather for strength than grace.

Marie Collier had her little vanities, like most people; as, for instance, in the matter of her name. She plumed herself on being "Madame Collier;" not plain prosaic "Mrs." In the matter of dress, she did not study the becoming. Vanity here took the opposite course, not necessarily less vain. She prided herself on a stoical indifference to appearances.

"Preposterous!" she repeated, taking a pin from her mouth, sticking it into the serge, and reaching energetically across the dining-room table for scissors. Mr. Trevelyan stood on the other side, upright and stern. "I declare the world is going crazy. General Villiers, over sixty years old—and a baby of sixteen! Preposterous!"

"Matters are bad enough without exaggeration. General Villiers is fifty-five, and Evelyn is just eighteen."

"Eighteen and fifty-five! He might be her grandfather! It is wicked! Downright wicked!" declared Madame Collier, paying off her heat of spirit into the folding and pinning. "I never heard such an idea in my life. Who told you?"

"General Villiers. I met him half-an-hour since. He seemed too much delighted to keep the thing to himself; but it is not to be known just yet."

"And Miss Devereux?"

"I gather that she is taken by surprise—"

"I should just think so!"

"But that she will offer no serious objection."

"Sybella Devereux would offer no serious objection if the world were to be turned into a cream-cheese. She hasn't the wits. Oh, she will fall in with the plan—glad to get the girl off her hands. The General can do as he likes—though how he manages to reconcile his conscience passes my understanding."

"He must decide for himself."

"He's sure to do that—and for Evelyn too. What man doesn't? He'll follow his own inclinations, of course, and sacrifice that young creature, before she understands what it all means. Why, she's an infant! What has she seen of life? Care for him! It's out of the question! Preposterous! Yes, I dare say she cares after a fashion—the way a girl cares for her grandfather. Likes to be the Lady of Dutton Park, no doubt! That's the bait. And she and Miss Devereux don't pull together. Anybody with half an eye can see! A lucky chance of escape, no doubt—but as for that child being in love with General Villiers—! I know better. The girl's

an actress, if she lets him think so. But it's the General that I blame. She doesn't know what she is doing, and he does. Don't talk to me again of his goodness! I've no patience with such goodness! It's downright wickedness!" cried the Rector's sister, dropping a small shower of pins by way of climax, for anger opens the lips.

Her tone changed suddenly. "Jean! What are you doing there? You have no business to creep in and listen to what people are saying."

"I'm just come home," Jean said in self-defence. She had approached so near that Mme. Collier really had no excuse for not seeing her sooner, beyond abstraction of ideas. Jean had reached the end of the table, not creeping, but walking with her usual erect bearing and light footfall. There she had stopped, electrified by the words which reached her ears. She thought some dreadful calamity must be impending.

"Come home! Yes. But why don't you show yourself properly? I hate creeping and listening ways."

Jean grew stiff under the sense of injustice. Mr. Trevelyan's eyes travelled over her.

"Did you mean to listen, Jean?"

"No, father—" very low.

"I have a great mind to put her to bed for it," declared Marie Collier.

"Jean did not mean to listen!" Mr. Trevelyan was a strictly just man. He had never found Jean in untruth, and until he should do so he would trust her implicitly. "The door was

not shut; and we might have seen her come in. How much did you hear?"

This was to Jean. A lump in the child's throat almost prevented speech. She swallowed with difficulty, and said, "General Villiers is going to do something bad."

"General Villiers is going to marry Evelyn Devereux. That is not 'something bad' in the sense you mean. Your aunt is sorry to hear it, because he is too old for such a young girl, and the thing is unsuitable. But remember, it is not your business. Unless by accident, you would not have heard it at present; and the matter must not go further. I trust to your honour."

"She will go and talk to Cyril the first thing. I know what children are."

Mr. Trevelyan looked searchingly into the troubled eyes of his little daughter. They met his, clear and resolute, though pained.

"Can I depend on you, Jean?"

"Yes, father."

"It is not to be mentioned again, unless somebody speaks first to you. And then the less said the better. You will not repeat what you heard us say."

"No!"

A slight dry smile crept into the grim lines round Mr. Trevelyan's mouth.

"Marie, you need not be afraid. That child is trustworthy."

Jean's face changed. Any word of praise was rare in her little life. She hardly knew what to make of it. Mr. Trevelyan, watching still, did not quite know what to make of her. He knew well the Trevelyan half of Jean: but the sensitive loving Ingram half was commonly veiled from his sight: he scarcely recognised its existence. The sudden radiance of response in her eyes, and then the quiver of her lips, surprised him. He did not know what he had said to bring about such results.

Before he could speak, Jean was gone. She felt a rush of tears coming, and fled wildly away to a retired corner of the garden, there to sob her little heart out, not knowing what made her cry.

"Why, Jean!"

Jem's voice startled her to her feet; and tears were checked by a mighty effort. To be found in such a condition was in Jean's opinion a dire disgrace. She stood bolt upright, herself again, though with wet cheeks.

"Please don't tell," she begged.

"Not I! Don't you know me better? What is it all about, little woman?"

No answer came, and he did not press the question, shrewdly suspecting that sharp words from Madame Collier or rough ones from Oswald lay below her distress.

He was not far wrong: though indeed Jean would have found it hard to analyse the different ingredients which went to the making up of that distress. The actual last straw had been the softening touch of her father's unwonted praise; but further back was the aunt's displeasure; and further back still another grief. This was the last afternoon

of her short holiday, and Oswald had chosen to spend it away from her.

She was a lonely little being, commonly. Her fervent love had a scant return: her thoughts and feelings were not understood. Few guessed what a sensitive organisation underlay the somewhat curt exterior. With her brother, the child's heart was always craving for a show of affection which never came. No doubt Oswald loved Jean after a fashion: but he loved himself much more; while Jean's love for him was a rapt devotion.

A woman too often lavishes gold, only to receive copper in exchange. Jean was learning early the sense of loss entailed by such barter. At times the vague loneliness would take shape in a thirst for her mother. When Oswald had treated her to a boyish rebuff, she would lie awake at night, clasping her pillow with both arms, and wondering how it would feel to have a mother's arms thus folded tightly round her. The Ingram part of Jean did so cry out for love and gentleness: while the Trevelyan part was ashamed, and tried to stand independently aloof.

With Jem she had a sense of placid satisfaction, unknown in other quarters. She did not pour upon him the frantic devotion which she poured upon Oswald: but there was happiness in his companionship. She could trust his unvarying kindness; and she felt herself to be understood by him. This consciousness often drew Jean on to open her mind to Jem, as to no other human being.

"Where is Oswald this afternoon?" Jem asked. "Cricket! Ah, that's unfortunate. And you couldn't get there to look on. What a pity you are a girl, as girls can't join! I say, Jean, suppose you come for a walk with me up the gorge. I'm all alone; and I want somebody."

Which was true—for Jean's sake. He had not wanted somebody for his own sake, unless it were a somebody unattainable.

Jem loved to haunt the gorge these days, for Evelyn's sake. He would always associate one particular turn in the glen with her face.

They were in the wildest part of the gorge, more than an hour later, beyond the "point of the V," and in the second arm of it. Return could be either along that branch and across divers meadows, or else it could be back the way they had come. Jem decided on the latter, and when they reached the rustic bridge at the Point, he took Jean's hand for a race down the path, resolved to shake the gravity out of her.

He had found the child a pleasant companion, fearless in climbing, untirable in walking, full of quaint simplicity and intelligence. He had exerted himself to interest and amuse her, till all traces of the little trouble were gone; and she had poured out her ideas with a rare frankness. But she had been sober throughout—a slim solemn upright child.

Down they came now, full swing; Jem's light run well matched by a speed of foot in Jean which few children of eight or nine could emulate. Jem of course hung back for her sake, yet not so much as might be expected. Jean hung on his strong hand, like a bird, rushing beside him with a glow of pleasure, for once perfectly natural and childlike.

Jem was delighted. He had not seen her so before. Looking down into the eager face, and at the steady shine of the greenish-brown eyes, he asked himself again, "Will she be

so plain?" Jem began to think she would not. "But I wish the poor little mite had a brighter existence."

Faster and faster they descended the rough path, as he saw her enjoyment. Soon they passed at a run the open space which had vividly awakened Evelyn's admiration. Reaching an acute bend beyond, they dashed round, glowing and laughing, to find themselves unexpectedly face to face with another couple, slowly ascending the glen.

Jem took in the situation at a glance. A light shock darted through his whole nervous system.

For Evelyn Devereux was there—Evelyn, by the side of General Villiers. Her hand was through his arm; her face was upturned with a sweet confidingness to his; and the General's head was bent from its superior height towards the fair girl, with a fatherly—no, not a fatherly—interest. Something altogether different from a fatherly interest. Jem saw this. He saw the General's momentary embarrassment, and the soft flush on Evelyn's cheek.

Jem dropped Jean's hand, and stood like one struck dumb. Evelyn's first view of him, had been a surprise to her. She had seen him before in a shy and admiring mood; but Jem's real nature was better shown in his vigorous rush down the gorge. The sure free step, the well-proportioned lithe figure, the dancing grey eyes, and the kind care of the little child—all these came before Evelyn as a flash, unexpectedly.

General Villiers could not have pelted down the steep glen at such a pace for any consideration. He suffered from slight rheumatism of the knees; not enough to spoil his military walk, but enough to prevent violent exercise; besides, joints stiffen after fifty.

In one moment, Jem's career was checked. A sudden gravity crept into the warm face, and the grey eyes, emptied of their sunshine, looked earnestly, questioningly, at Evelyn.

"Nonsense!" Jem was saying to himself, putting aside a sick fear. "Nonsense! Absurd! It can't be!"

But General Villiers, embarrassed no longer, looked smilingly at the small hand on his arm, then at Jem.

"I meant to tell you this evening," he said in a deep tone of happiness. "You have found us out sooner. My darling—she is mine now!" He glanced at Jean, who had moved delicately away, with a child's sense of being de trop. "My own!" the General repeated. "Who could have dreamt that such happiness would be for me?"

The healthy glow was gone from Jem's face. He looked grave, dignified—taller and older too than Evelyn had imagined him. One hand, hanging by his side, clenched itself till the nails almost pierced the skin, but except in his sudden paleness, no sign of pain was allowed to appear. Not all Jem's force of will could control the rush of blood to the heart, as he spoke a few words of formal congratulation.

The General, wrapped up in his own delight, did not see: but Evelyn, far more widely awake, noted at once the change. She could not fail to conjecture its cause: and, knife-like, the question shot through her mind—

"Have I made a mistake? Have I been too quick?"

Too late for that now! Evelyn smothered down the thought, with a voiceless "No! No!" and clung more closely to the General's arm. His attention was drawn by the pressure.

"Yes; we will go on—we have not too much time. I shall be back by-and-by," to Jem. "Good-bye, for an hour or two. Yes, I know you congratulate me. Everybody must!"

A few more meaningless words, and they parted. Evelyn had not much to say during the remainder of the walk, but the General had plenty, so her silence mattered less. He had reached an age when most men like a good listener. Evelyn could safely follow her own train of thought, while clinging to his arm. She had to follow it, had to stamp down the questioning which threatened to disturb her peace.

Not that Evelyn was in love with Jem. Nothing of the kind. It was only that his look had been a revelation to her. It was only that she had awakened to the realisation of another manner of life, upon which she had shut the door.

Too late now, she told herself firmly. She had promised, and she would keep her promise.

Then she found the General saying something—what was it? About—how soon?

Evelyn flushed, and her eyes filled. "Oh, soon—the sooner the better!" she said. "Why should we wait? I belong to you now."

BOOK II.

AFTER SEVEN YEARS.

"There wild woods grow, and rivers flow,
And mony a hill between;
But day and night my fancy's flight
Is ever wi' my Jean."

R. BURNS.

CHAPTER I.

MRS. KENNEDY'S NOTIONS.

"How we talk in the little town below!"
"PIPPA PASSES": R.
BROWNING.

"A REGULAR niminy-piminy-molly-coddle! That's what he'll be, my dear."

"But don't you think—by-and-by—when he gets out into the world—?"

"No, I don't. Miss Devereux will have done the business by then. I wouldn't say so much to most people, Mabel: but it's

just the old story over again—the hen with one chick, you know. And an old maid hen is the worst of all, don't you see?"

"Only he's such a nice boy!" regretfully.

"He's lovely!" said Mrs. Kennedy. "A real out-and-out gentleman, and the prettiest manners! Too pretty by half for a boy of seventeen! Why, he ought to be a hobbledehoy, and there isn't a scrap of hobbledehoyism about him. It isn't natural. It's like a tadpole growing into a frog, without dropping its tail, you know. And it's ruination to any boy to be treated as if he was a spoonful of salt, ready to melt. That's what she does, don't you see?"

"But at school—"

"Oh, well, yes, there's school. Of course there's school. It's a good school too, from all one hears. Capital masters, and all that; and a hundred and twenty boys isn't bad. I'd sooner have him at a regular public school: but this is next best. Only, the moment Cyril comes home, all the good's undone. Mustn't get his feet wet, don't you know? Dear me, if my boys were coddled like that, there'd be a rebellion, I do believe. They wouldn't stand it, not even from their mother. But Cyril's been brought up to like a fuss."

"He had one bad attack on his chest."

"Three years ago! I wouldn't wrap a boy up in flannel and cotton-wool all the rest of his days, just for that. I'll tell you what, Mabel—you get your father to interfere. A doctor always can step in. Everybody expects good advice from a doctor."

"Not unasked advice," Mabel said, smiling. She was a nice ladylike girl of about nineteen, the eldest of Dr. Ingram's

three daughters.

"Oh, as for advice—Miss Devereux is like other people. She doesn't ask for advice, except when she wants to be told that she's in the right. That's the way, don't you know? Why, she wouldn't have sent him to school at all to this very day, I do believe, if General Villiers and his wife hadn't made a rumpus."

"Still—five years and a half of schooling ought to have done something for him," Mabel remarked.

This was Mrs. Kennedy's "At Home" afternoon; and she was seated in the small drawing-room of St. John's Vicarage, expecting callers. Friday had been from time immemorial—in other words, so long as she had lived at Dutton—her "At Home" day.

Not that she dignified it by any such important title: "I am generally in, you know, on Friday afternoons," was her fashion of asking friends to call at that time. She had a free-and-easy manner of speaking. The County people did not care for Mrs. Kennedy; not that they objected to a touch of originality, but they were not satisfied as to her connections.

"To talk of one's 'At Home day' sounds so fussy, don't you know," she often said. "Not fit for such little people as we, my dear! If it was the Canon, now!" For the mother-church of Dutton was held by Canon Meyers.

Mrs. Kennedy was not good-looking, despite a pair of genial and expressive blue eyes. Moreover, she posed badly, rounding her shoulders and squaring her elbows. Though she dressed well in point of material, her clothes were put on more or less awry; and an end of loose hair was often out of place, needing to be perpetually tucked up. She had

been known to sit through her Friday afternoon, with a half pinned collar dangling loosely on one side. Such little matters did not affect her serenity. Had she discovered the collar in the midst of a room-full she would have gone calmly to the mirror to pin it into position, without the slightest flurry. Whereby it is evident that Mrs. Kennedy had seen something of good society, even though her family connections might not be altogether unexceptionable.

The frank simplicity of her manner was sometimes mistaken for rusticity. But she was no rustic. She had considerable perception, and not a little knowledge of human nature. There were even touches of intellectual power, only her education had been deficient; and when entirely at her ease, she was apt to express herself in an odd unconventional fashion.

A more devoted Parish worker than Mrs. Kennedy could hardly be found. Mr. Kennedy was not strong in the visiting line, having usually too many committees and meetings on hand; but his wife did her best, as a wife should, to supplement his deficiencies, to fill up gaps in his administration. In public, she always appeared to be at one with her husband in his views and proceedings; in private, she had her own views and her own theories.

Some intimate friends would have described her as "Not quite so desperately Low-Church as he is!"

However, as a matter of duty, she upheld him praiseworthy.

"Have you heard that General and Mrs. Villiers arrived last Monday?" asked Mabel.

"O yes, I know. All the world knows that, my dear. Time enough too—after nearly four years abroad! People who

have got property ought to look after it, and not go scrummaging all over the world. But of course it's no wonder Mrs. Villiers likes change—a pretty young thing, tied to a husband old enough to be her father, to say the very least. And then the General's rheumatism makes such a nice excuse for keeping him abroad. The General is a most delightful man, of course—agreeable and all that—and I'm sure she's quite prettily fond of him. It's as nice and proper as can be; only you know one does sometimes expect to hear her say 'Grandpa' when she speaks to him; and when 'William' pops out instead, it gives one a shock. And then the Park must be so awfully dull: for it's only a certain sort of people he cares to see, you know. Just those that think exactly like himself."

"The St. John set," suggested Mabel, with a scintillation of fun in her quiet eyes.

"Well, my dear, the St. John set is very good. Such nice dear people, you know. I'm sure the dear good General always says he is perfectly content with what he finds among them: and if he and they—he and we, I mean—Now, Mabel, don't look wicked! As to family, we've old Lady Lucas, you know: and Miss Devereux is equal to anybody; and then nothing can be more respectable than a lawyer and a Colonel, not to speak of the General himself when he's at home. But still, though he likes us well enough, I'm not sure about his wife. She comes with him always, as regular as clockwork—used to come, I mean—but you know there's no doubt she's got a very uncommon mind, and she reads books that you and I wouldn't know what on earth they were all about! And I shouldn't quite think all the dear good St. John's people would exactly satisfy her: I mean, intellectually, don't you know? I should think she would want a little more friction, perhaps—and originality, you know."

"So my father feels."

"Oh, your father is so clever—I don't suppose he could expect to find his match in Dutton, dear. One can't help being a little afraid of him, you know, he's so clever."

Mabel laughed. "I have a piece of news," she said. "Who do you think is expected at Dulveriford Rectory in a day or two? Can't guess? Jem Trevelyan."

"Mr. James Trevelyan! Your cousin. He hasn't been for ages. Centuries!" said Mrs. Kennedy, with the calm air of one stating a fact.

"Not since I was a child. Yes, it is years ago. But he really is coming at last, for a few days' rest. He has overdone himself at the East-End."

"He's a nice man—very nice! Not one of those odd sort of people that you can't tell whatever they are after next! But my husband doesn't quite care for him, I'm afraid."

Mabel was intimate enough, not to be classed among the horde of mere outsiders.

"We met him in Town last year, and he said something or other—I'm sure I don't know what, only it was something my husband didn't like. I suppose he's just a scrap too Churchy, you know, for poor dear Thomas. But I'm sure he's such a good man; and if anybody ever lived a real missionary life, it's away in those horrible London slums of despond."

"There's a ring. Another call. I must go."

"Oh, to-day of course! Sometimes everybody comes all together, and then I just don't know what to do. I feel all

sat upon and 'scrushed,'" said Mrs. Kennedy, in her unconventional language, while she looked affectionately at Mabel with kind soft eyes. "The only thing to do, don't you know, is to let them have it out. Everybody has always got plenty to say. But such a crowd won't come to-day, I don't think. It's too fine. Must you go, really? Well, good-bye, and mind you tell your father that he really ought to look after that poor little baronet, and keep him from being turned into a molly. Oh, I'm forgetting—there's a note for him from my husband. Couldn't you take it? Thomas!" cried Mrs. Kennedy, opening the door, to find herself face to face with Miss Devereux.

Mrs. Kennedy fell back a step. "Oh, how do you do? I'm so glad it is you—not a man. Just think if it had been a man!" she said frankly. "Do pray come in. I'm only calling my husband to—"

Mr. Kennedy appeared through an opposite door. He was undersized, plain-featured, and shy-mannered, with anxious pale-tinted eyes which saw little before them, by reason of the mental eyes being bent habitually inward. When his glance fell upon Miss Devereux, he put out one hand, with a gradual smile, deprecating in kind.

"Mabel is just going home, dear. Would you like to send any message to Dr. Ingram?"

"I—yes, I have a note," said Mr. Kennedy.

He did not at once go in search of it, but followed Miss Devereux into the drawing-room, and stood looking at her with his mild blank goodness of expression. Nobody of any penetration could see Mr. Kennedy, and not recognise the goodness written in his face.

"Dear man! He is half in heaven already!" Some of his more attached friends declared; though if there were truth in the words, it remains an uncontrovertible fact that to be "half in heaven already," does not obviate a considerable amount of earthliness about the half still upon earth. The earthliness takes different forms in different cases.

"I hope your nephew is well this summer—growing stronger?" said Mr. Kennedy.

"Thank you, dear Cyril is fairly well, but I have to be very careful of him," sighed Sybella. She did not look so markedly older for her seven additional years as might have been expected, but she had gained in a certain conscious importance, in an air of responsibility. She had learned by this time to appreciate her own position, and even to act for herself. Still—Sybella was Sybella.

"He is always so delicate, dear boy! A great anxiety to me! And at School you know—though I cannot speak highly enough of the school—your recommendation!" effusively. "Such a delightful man, the head-master—so truly Evangelical!—And all the arrangements so perfect. Still of course there cannot be quite the same individual care at school as at home, and I am sadly afraid the dear boy is sometimes a little imprudent. I can't think how it is—boys do so dislike great-coats; and I cannot make him say whether he always remembers to change his shoes the moment they get damp. It is so very essential, you know. I do my best to impress upon him the need for care. The way he gets on is really astonishing; such a love for books! I tell him he is never happy without a book in his hand; and he works so hard—too hard, dear boy. It makes me so afraid for his dear brain! I really cannot let him study through the holidays—it is quite too much!"

"Oh, I shouldn't think an hour or two a day could hurt anybody," suggested Mrs. Kennedy. "Keep him out of mischief, don't you know?"

"Indeed, I beg your pardon! I think I am the best judge as to that."

Mrs. Kennedy somehow always managed to excite Sybella's bristles.

"The dear boy had a headache only yesterday: and I don't like the way he coughs. I shall have to consult Dr. Ingram."

"Oh, come, he really did look uncommonly well yesterday," protested Mrs. Kennedy. "Not robust, of course—one doesn't expect that—but plenty of vigour. Thomas, Mabel is waiting."

Mr. Kennedy beat a deprecatory retreat, not sorry perhaps to leave the ladies to fight their little battle out together. After an interval of ten minutes, he slowly returned.

"I am very sorry—I have mislaid the note," he said. "But perhaps you would kindly take a message, asking your father to call. This is the woman's address."

"Must my father go there to-day?" asked Mabel, dismayed. "He has been all that round by this time."

"I am afraid it is pressing. One does not know what is the matter. I told her your father would be sure to look in before night. The note ought to have been sent sooner, but I—in fact, I forgot."

Mabel knew better than to protest, and she went off swiftly. Outside the gate, a girl was waiting—about sixteen in age, with a pale oval face, and clear greenish eyes.

"Jean, are you out of all patience?" cried Mabel. "I couldn't get away sooner: and now I must just race home. You ought to have come in."

"I'd rather not," Jean said decisively, as they began "the race."

The two girls were second cousins.

"You don't care for the Kennedys, I know."

"I don't mind them."

"That doesn't mean liking."

"No; I suppose not. I don't think I care for a great many people!" reflectively.

"A great many! My dear, whom do you really and honestly like, out of your own proper circle? Except Cyril, and Jem, and I suppose ourselves?"

"Mrs. Villiers. And lots of poor people."

"You have not seen Mrs. Villiers for close upon four years. You were an infant then."

"I don't forget."

"No—I believe that! Jean, I declare, I won't have you so frightfully unsociable. You ought to like people more. My father says there is something nice in everybody, if only one is willing to see it."

"Then I suppose I'm not willing," quoth straightforward Jean.

"I wish Mr. Kennedy had sent this morning. My father will have to go all the way down to the lower end of the town again. He might just as well have done the business when he was there two hours ago. He is so busy to-day."

"I don't call that nice of Mr. Kennedy."

"He doesn't think."

"Then he ought."

"Jean, you are always half pleased to find some little fault in Mr. Kennedy," murmured Mabel.

The words had no denial. Jean looked as if she had gained a new idea.

CHAPTER II.

MUD AND BRAMBLES.

"I wait for the day when dear hearts shall discover,
 While dear hands are laid on my head,
The child is a woman, the book may close ever,
 For all the lessons are said."

"I wait for my story—the birds cannot sing it,
 Not one as he sits on the tree;

The bells cannot ring it, but long years, O bring it,
Such as I wish it to be."

JEAN

INGELOW.

Dr. INGRAM'S house was almost outside the town, and thus far the two girls went together. At the garden-gate they stopped; Mabel ran indoors, after a hasty good-bye, and Jean pursued her solitary way.

Dutton was a good two miles from Dulveriford. Jean had permission to go to and fro, by the path through meadows and fields; not by the high road. She turned into the meadows directly after quitting the town, and went onward in a quick steadfast fashion, not dallying. This does not mean the absence of enjoyment. Jean had in her nature intense capabilities of enjoyment; and the sights and sounds of country life always thrilled her with a keen delight, which custom could not deaden.

Now and again she would pause for a few seconds to listen to the song of some little bird, to study the markings of a butterfly as it zigzagged past, to watch the contented munching of a pretty young cow. There were a good many cows in one field, and a good many horses in the next. Fear in connection with animals was a feeling unknown to Jean. She did not, however, linger long for anything.

Jean at sixteen was simply the child of nine expanded. The straight supple form was unchanged, only taller; the slim sunburnt hands were only longer and more capable. The greenish-brown eyes were serious as ever, with their old power of shining under excitement.

She was not "plain" now; the delicate straight features would admit of no such description; but neither was she beautiful; and "pretty" was a term which nobody could think of in connection with the severe simplicity of Jean's outlines, dress, and manner. People generally called her "uncommon;" a safe word which might admit of anything.

No change had taken place in Jean's manner of life. It had been a continuous going on in the old lines; the harder part of her studiously cultivated, the softer part stamped down and driven inward. She had been trained in a splendid mastery of principle over inclination; she had been taught any amount of self-repression and self-control; body and mind had been well and wisely handled. But training and cultivation of the heart's affections had not been equally prominent. Mr. Trevelyan was always just and even, always entirely high-principled; and Madame Collier was always practical. Neither of the two was in manner gentle or loving.

Had it not been for three definite outlets, Jean's softer and more affectionate side would have been walled up and subjected to a slow starvation. These three were—her passionate and absorbing love for Oswald; her quiet friendship with Cyril; her interest in the sick and needy of the parish. Jean's tenderness thus found a three-fold vent, and did not die; but at present it crept through those vents in a shamefaced and surreptitious fashion.

Jem Trevelyan might have supplied a fourth softening element. During years, however, he and Jean had seen little one of another. With her Ingram cousins, Mabel especially, Jean was on agreeable terms, and that was all; for the three girls, pleasant as they were, and popular in many quarters, touched no inner chord of Jean's being. As Mabel had said, Jean "really liked" very few people. "Really to like"

in her case meant more than mere liking, and not "really to like" meant profound indifference.

Springing over her fourth stile, on the way homeward, she was arrested by an exclamation:

"Jean! That's jolly!"

"Cyril! You here!"

"I'm come to meet you—by accident."

"How did you know where I was?"

"Intuition."

"Nonsense."

"Madame Collier told me you'd gone to Dutton, so of course I knew you'd come this way. I say!—Give me that basket."

"No. Cyril, let it alone. I like to carry something."

"So do I!"—dexterously twisting the handle off her arm.

"How you bother!"

"Yes, I know. It's only for your good. What's inside the basket?"

"Nothing that concerns you."

"Hanks of darning cotton, I do believe. I say, Jean, you must use an uncommon lot of old socks at the Rectory. Madame Collier's one earthly occupation is turning them over. I never find her at anything else; unless it is grubbing up stones in the garden."

"Stockings, you mean; not socks."

"Two varieties of the same genus. What are you hurrying for, now?"

"Aunt Marie will want me."

"Let her! I want you more."

"I can't wait, really. She will be vexed."

"Have you got to darn? I'll come and read to you, then."

Cyril had scarcely yet overtaken Jean in height. While actually almost a year her senior, he was commonly supposed to be the younger of the two. His make was so slight as to give an appearance of fragility, not inconsistent with a certain wiry vigour, but heightened by the girlish hands and pale complexion, not to speak of a face hatchet-like in thinness. Breadth of brow gave force to the latter, but the dark hair clustered still in thick waves; and the long-lashed violet eyes, though redeemed from insipidity by any amount of fun, lent him so soft and "pretty" an expression, that it was no wonder he had earned at school the nickname of "Missy."

This did not imply contempt or unpopularity. More than five years back, on first leaving Ripley Brow, with its enervating influences and unlimited petting, for the rougher world of school, Cyril had suffered much, and had had a hard battle to fight. Miss Devereux little guessed how much of real distress had been entailed upon the timid child by her previous policy, or how he might justly have blamed her for long months of misery. Happily, the check of a more invigorating atmosphere came in time to prevent life-long enfeeblement.

He had struggled through the worst long ago. He had now been for years a boy among boys; to all appearance as spirited and careless as any of them, when at school. If to some extent he suffered still from want of nerve, the fact was usually veiled. But it was odd how, immediately he came home for the holidays, he would relapse more or less into his old ways, responding to Sybella's petting. As of yore, his affectionate and clinging disposition, together with an easy sweetness of temper, made him malleable; and also as of yore, the chief bracing element in his Dulveriford life was—Jean.

Jean had not yet lost the impulse to take care of him, to lead, and to expect that he should follow. Growth thus far had been faster with her than with him. There was marked promise of intellectual power in Cyril, but in almost all respects he was still behind his age. Jean remained the stronger, the swifter, the more fearless, the keener in perception, the quicker in understanding, actually the elder, so far.

It was a singular friendship between the two. Each cared greatly for the other, but not after the same mode. While Cyril's happiness was bound up in Jean, Jean's happiness was bound up in Oswald. Cyril cared for no human being as he cared for Jean. Love for her had grown with his growth, winding itself in and out with the very strands of his being. Jean was fond of Cyril, and she missed his companionship when he was away, but she gave him no passionate affection. That was reserved for Oswald.

"Why are you not at Dutton Park this afternoon?" asked Jean.

"Because I'm here."

"Mrs. Villiers must want you."

"Mrs. Villiers isn't Jean, and I'm not Oswald. Why don't you call her 'Evelyn'?"

"I don't know. When did you go last?"

"When? Oh, to-day's Friday. Monday evening I was there—and Wednesday. Tuesday she came to us. Often enough, surely. She's got a lot to do, settling in. I'll go again soon, of course; perhaps to-morrow morning."

"It ought to be to-day."

"I'll see. What a lot you do think of Evelyn, to be sure!"

"Anyone would! If I had such a sister—"

"Well! If you had?"

"I would—Cyril, what's that?"

"Where? What are you looking at?"

"There! Don't you see?"

They had reached the next stile, and Jean stood not far from it, gazing across a wide muddy ditch upon the bank below the hedge.

"A bird—look! It's a robin. I can see its red breast. It has been hurt."

"It's not a nestling. Too big."

"Then some horrid boy has thrown a stone. Hark! You can hear it 'peep.' Poor little thing! It is almost too weak to move. I must get it."

"You can't; just look at that slush."

"Slush! I'm not afraid of wet feet."

The touch of scorn was enough. Before Jean could move, Cyril was down, ankle-deep, in the very middle of the wet slush, which indeed proved to be of the nature of thick watery mud.

"Cyril! How absurd! I didn't mean you to go. I meant to do it myself. I should have gone to the stile, and climbed along the bank."

"You couldn't. It's all brambles."

Jean nearly said, "I don't mind scratches," but forbore. Had she uttered the words, he would certainly have charged the brambles, to gain scars honourable in her eyes.

"I'll come too." Jean loved a scramble.

"No, don't. Stop! It's no use. Such a mess! Wait a moment. Here he is—poor little chap! There, don't peck! What do you mean to do with him? I believe his leg's broken."

"Oh, bring him to me."

"All right, I'm coming."

Jean bent over to receive the fluttering bundle of feathers, and examined it tenderly, while Cyril sprang up on terra firma. Furtively, he endeavoured to wipe his boots on the grass; not openly, for fear Jean should count him effeminate. He had not yet learned that a love of cleanliness is not in essence unmasculine.

"Where's the basket? I'll make a soft bed of grass. Yes, please gather some. You poor little thing! Fancy if we had not found you! It's certainly a broken leg. We must get home as fast as possible, and aunt Marie will know what to do."

"You'll have to tie up the leg in a splint."

"Yes. I'll see. A bit of match, perhaps. Aunt Marie is so clever at that sort of thing. Cyril, your boots are soaking! You ought to go straight home and change them."

"Fudge!"

"What would Miss Devereux say?"

"Anything she likes."

"And you may catch cold."

"I'm not going!"

Such an opportunity to assert his manliness was not to be lost. Jean might think it her duty to uphold Miss Devereux, but he knew that if he went, she would—well, perhaps not despise, but undoubtedly she would pity him. To be pitied by Jean was more than Cyril could stand.

"If you catch cold—"

"I shan't catch cold."

"Well, I have warned you."

"All right."

In two minutes Jean forgot all about his boots, in attention to her feathered invalid. Cyril by no means forgot, for their

soaked condition and outward muddiness both meant discomfort, but he never thought of giving way.

As they reached the Rectory door, Mr. Trevelyan came out.

"Jean, just back? What are you after?" This question did not mean displeasure. It only meant that he always expected everybody to be "after" some definite object, and that he wished to hear specified the precise end and aim of Jean's existence at that moment.

"I'm going in to see if aunt Marie wants me. And this bird—"

"A robin—broken leg," said Mr. Trevelyan, touching the little creature with kind fingers. "No, your aunt doesn't want you. Give over the bird to her, and come with me to Dutton Park."

"Now?"

"I met the General, and he mentioned that Mrs. Villiers particularly asks an early call."

"Wouldn't aunt Marie like to go?"

"No, she prefers that I should take you."

Jean's eyes shone: her usual sign of pleasure. She never thought of telling her father that she had already walked to Dutton and back. The fact would have made no difference, if he counted it her duty to go now.

"I've not seen Evelyn for a day or two," remarked Cyril, the wistful look which always strengthened his likeness to Evelyn creeping into his eyes.

Its effect upon Mr. Trevelyan was to bring the question, "Would you like to go with us?"

Cyril's answer, if short, was unequivocal. He had not entirely lost a certain boyish fear of Mr. Trevelyan, but Jean was a more than counterbalancing attraction.

They went by the road this time—a somewhat shorter route than by the fields. Mr. Trevelyan walked fast and steadily, with long swinging strides, and the other two kept pace with him as best they might: Jean easily, from long practice; Cyril less easily, though he would on no account have admitted the fact. He was better at fast running than at fast walking; and the weight of his soaked boots pulled him back.

Outside Dutton they saw the "Brow" carriage approaching, Sybella seated therein with state and dignity.

"I say!" muttered Cyril in foreboding accents.

The carriage drew up, and Sybella bent forward to shake hands with Mr. Trevelyan, whom she did not exactly recognise as her Pastor, although she lived in his Parish, since their views differed on certain points. A puckered forehead showed discontent. She was never pleased to see Cyril with the Trevelyan family; and, considering how Cyril haunted Jean, it was remarkable that her eyes should be so seldom vexed with the vision. Perhaps an explanation lay in the fact that Miss Devereux loved high roads and shops, while Jean detested both; wherefore their orbits were seldom entangled.

"How do you do? A very fine day. I hope Madame Collier is well. Really I must call upon her one day soon—but so many engagements, you know—always something turning up. Cyril, my dear boy, I could not imagine where you were.

I was so anxious to take you to the Park. I have had really quite to apologise. Two whole days since you went; and you know it must seem strange. Where can you have been?"

"I am going to Evelyn now."

"But I could have saved you the long walk. Such a hot day! I am not sure whether I had not better turn back—" Sybella hesitated, debating with herself whether, in that case, it would not be needful to give the Trevelyan's a lift also.

She could hardly pick up her nephew, and leave them trudging in the dust. But Mr. Trevelyan was not approved of by some of her friends, and to be seen by certain of them driving through Dutton side by side with him—by old Lady Lucas, for example, or by Colonel Atherstone—such a juxtaposition of representative individuals was not to be thought of!

"I am afraid, though, that I cannot well spare the time. My dear boy, you had really better put off till another day, and come back with me. I am sure you are fatigued. This hot sun is enough to give anybody a headache. Quite too much for him," she added reproachfully to the Rector.

"Is it hot?" asked Mr. Trevelyan. He looked down and up, and around, as if studying Nature for a reply.

"Exceedingly hot! Most oppressive! Surely you—But people are so differently constituted," sighed Sybella, with an audible little puff of exhaustion. "Now I feel to-day quite incapable—really quite feeble and spiritless. I assure you, I could not walk a mile to save my life."

"That might prove a potent incentive," suggested Mr. Trevelyan, with another look at the tree-tops.

His irony was lost upon Sybella.

"Robust people do not suffer in the same way, I believe. So fortunate for them! But dear Cyril is always so very easily knocked up—and his poor head, you know—"

Cyril grew furiously red at having to endure this, with Jean standing by.

"My dear boy, you are quite flushed, you are indeed—quite overheated. It makes me so anxious. I really cannot possibly allow this sort of thing to go on. I am sure you have a headache."

"No, aunt!" Cyril's voice was seldom so gruff.

"No? But you are tired—fatigued. I am certain you will be overdone. If I—Cyril!!"

Mr. Trevelyan lifted his eyebrows, and Jean's lips twitched. Miss Devereux pointed with an agonised forefinger at Cyril's feet.

"Oh, I just got a little muddy. I'm all right."

"It's my fault," Jean said promptly.

"Boys don't mind a trifle of mud," quoth Mr. Trevelyan, with a solemn smile, perhaps not realising the extent to which the "trifle of mud" went.

"Mud! His boots are wet through and through! I can see it for myself. Boys in general are different. Cyril is not like other boys. He must take care. It is absolutely necessary. To go about with wet feet—I shall have him laid up all the holidays. Another attack on his chest like the last would—I assure you, the Brighton doctor told me, he could not

answer for the consequences," gasped the agitated lady. "My dear boy, get at once into the carriage. I must drive you home as fast as possible. As fast as possible, Grimshaw!" raising her voice.

And Grimshaw touched his hat.

"You must change your boots and stockings the very moment we arrive, and I must give you something hot to drink."

Had the Trevelyan's not been there, Cyril would no doubt have yielded without resistance. He might have felt a certain boyish dislike to the fuss—a dislike which had for some time been growing upon him; yet mere force of habit would have won the day. To be petted and coddled by his aunt was so much a matter of course, that hitherto he had submitted.

Jean's presence made all the difference. Cyril was fond of his aunt, and he liked to please her; indeed, he liked to please everybody, whether or no fondness came into the question. But his love for Jean, his desire to stand well in Jean's eyes, his dread of being pitied by Jean, were overwhelming motives. To step into the carriage, and be driven home for the purpose of changing his boots, while Jean stood looking on, was too much. For almost the first time, Sybella's petted darling refused to answer to the pull of her rein.

"Nonsense, aunt. I'm all right. I'm going on to see Evelyn."

"If I may advise, I should not recommend a drive with damp boots," said Mr. Trevelyan. "Exercise is safer than sitting still; and he can dry them, if needful, at the Park."

This was reasonable. But to expect Sybella to hear reason from Mr. Trevelyan would mean a dire ignorance of human nature.

"I beg your pardon. I think I am the best judge as to that," she said, reddening. "Cyril, my dear boy—No, I could not possibly run the risk!" to Mr. Trevelyan. "Cyril, my dear boy, you really must—Cyril, I insist! You must come home with me at once. Evelyn will understand. I will explain to her. I could not allow you to go on with your feet in such a condition. My dear boy, it is only for your own good—Pray make haste, and get in! Every moment's delay increases the risk. My dear boy, I assure you—Really, Cyril, I am very much surprised—this is not like you! I am afraid it is the consequence of—Cyril, if you do not come at once, I shall have—Not of course that I expect you to prefer to be with me, rather than with—It is only for your own sake! Cyril, this is really too much! I insist upon obedience!"

Cyril held resolutely back, thus far.

Mr. Trevelyan moved a step nearer.

"My boy, the more manly part will be to yield," he said very low; not too low for Jean as well as Cyril to hear.

The lad grew white, and looked at Jean.

"Yes, do go!" she said gently, pityingly.

Cyril could better have done without the pity: but Mr. Trevelyan's words took effect.

"I must beg of you, Cyril, not to delay. For your own sake as well as mine. I cannot wait any longer, and I insist upon your coming," Miss Devereux went on with querulous repetition.

"Good-bye," said Mr. Trevelyan.

He took Cyril's hand, with a warm grasp which spoke volumes: and from that hour, he had a hold upon the young baronet. "Come and see us again soon."

Cyril crimsoned to the roots of his hair, and stepped in.

"Poor boy: it is hard upon him," muttered the clergyman, as they drove off, Sybella talking still.

CHAPTER III.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

"Thus each retains his notions, every one."

JANE TAYLOR.

DUTTON PARK stood on sufficiently high ground to command a view of the town, and of the surrounding country. In one direction Ripley Brow might be seen, the Brow standing up boldly, more than two miles away. Between, the river wound in curves among low green banks and meadows, after its rush through the gorge.

On a fine day, such as this, anyone walking in the Park grounds could see the "S-like" windings shine here and there with the brightness of burnished metal in the sunshine; grey spaces of water intervening.

There were two ways of reaching the house from the main road. One was by a shady drive, well bowered, the trees meeting overhead in a continuous arch. The other lay through open park-like fields, ending in two large ponds, one on either side of the garden entrance. Following the latter road, Mr. Trevelyan and Jean lingered three or four minutes to watch the swans; then they crossed the wide lawn of the garden, which was sprinkled with pines and yews. Beds of massed colouring, closely packed, showed rich and artistic arrangements of tints. The house was extensive, white and low, guiltless of creepers, and on one side, sheltered by a group of mighty elms.

The great drawing-room, over forty-five feet long, was used only on state occasions. Evelyn's favourite resort for ordinary purposes was the library, a long four-windowed room, well lined with books. General Villiers had his private study besides, and Evelyn had her boudoir; but when at home, she was usually to be found in the library.

On this particular afternoon, she stood in the end window, a large bow, gazing somewhat pensively upon the outer view: not as if she very much cared for it.

At twenty-five, Evelyn well fulfilled the promise of her girlhood, so far as actual beauty was concerned. The delicacy of form and feature, the perfection of colouring, the grace of movement, were unchanged. They had only ripened into a fuller loveliness, with the addition of a finished repose and graciousness of manner, an exquisite high-bred ease, which no mere girl can show.

She wore a cream-coloured dress of India muslin, handsome in make and rich in embroidery. There was about her every appearance of a life of ease, of luxury, of affectionate care, every token of a sheltered existence. Looking upon her from without, it might seem that she had not a want ungratified.

Yet those who studied Evelyn Villiers with observant eyes were conscious of something lacking. They knew that life to this fair creature had not thus far been all that it might have been. The delicate cheek had already a slight inward curve, marring its perfect oval; a curve which in such a face could only have come from illness or from wear and tear. The graceful bearing had about it a touch of weariness, of listless indifference, like one tired of her surroundings. The closed lips had gained a faintly satirical set; and the violet eyes contained a look of forlornness, as if she thirsted perpetually after something unattainable. It had been said that the expression of those eyes was as of a captive creature, chained down, and hopeless of escape.

But these were the views of those only who could see a little below the surface. People in general said how pretty and sweet and charming she was—only rather too exclusive, rather difficult to know! And what an enviable life she led! To be sure, one might wish that the husband were a few years younger: but then he was rich and gentlemanly, delightful in his manners, and such a good man too! What mattered a little discrepancy in age? Mrs. Villiers was a happy woman: she had everything she could possibly desire!

"Mr. Trevelyan! How good of him! And Jean!"

Evelyn did not stir till the callers were announced. Then she went forward, in her soft restrained fashion, holding out two

hands, a rare gesture with Mrs. Villiers.

"I am so glad to see you both. This is kind. It is just what I wanted, treating me like an old friend! Somehow I have always had the feeling that my most real friends were at Dulveriford Rectory; though I have seen so little of you since my marriage. I hope to see more now. We have come back to settle down for a time. My husband is tired of travelling."

"General Villiers was so good as to say that we might call at once, not waiting till after Sunday."

"Did he? That was kind. He knew I wished it. And this is Jean! The old look, I see—hardly changed."

She kissed Jean's cheek in her winning way—for Evelyn could be irresistibly winning when she chose, though she did not always choose.

"Do I know you well enough?" she asked.

"Jean is a child still," promptly asserted Mr. Trevelyan, while Jean breathed a "Yes" of unlimited meaning.

Evelyn smiled. She knew in a moment her power over the girl, and she was glad to know it. Jean interested her: not only for the sake of Mr. Trevelyan, whom Evelyn had always liked. Jean herself was so uncommon: not exactly good-looking, but so very uncommon. There was a trenchant attractiveness about the aristocratic pose of Jean's head, and the straightforward earnestness of her singular eyes, combined with an abnormal simplicity of dress and manner.

Evelyn's glance travelled over her, taking in all particulars: then she sat down on a sofa, making Jean do the same.

"I want to know this child well," she said, with her sweet graciousness. "Yes, I suppose she is a child still—compared with me. But I have a fancy that we shall be friends some day. Will you come and see me, Jean, when I am alone, now and then?"

Jean's eyes brightened into a golden glow like sunshine. "If I may," she said.

"The oftener the better," quoth Mr. Trevelyan, who was under the power of Evelyn's magic wand, though not to such an extent as to lose his own individuality.

"Thanks! Then come often, Jean—as often as you can be spared. I must introduce you to my little boudoir. Only think, that naughty brother of mine has not been near me since Wednesday morning."

Explanations had to be given. Jean left them to her father, and Mr. Trevelyan said no more than was needful, but Evelyn drew certain particulars from him by skilful questioning.

"The old story," she said. "My aunt will do her best to spoil him. After all, the only hope lies in school."

"Cyril doesn't want to be a coddle," spoke up Jean in his defence.

"You and he are great friends, are you not?"

"I don't know. Yes; I suppose so," Jean answered slowly, as if anxious to be exact.

Presently, with an abrupt change of subject—only, nothing that Evelyn did ever had an abrupt effect—Mrs. Villiers asked—

"What of Dutton parties and politics?"

"I am not a man of Dutton," was the answer.

"The better able, perhaps, to take a dispassionate outside view."

"That may be," cautiously, "but I am very busy in my own work. Not much time to watch other people."

"I wish 'other people' could say the same. It seems to me that the normal occupation of Dutton generally is to sit and look at its neighbours—not with approving eyes."

"A common result of too little to do."

"And looking at them means talking about them. Things have always been so, I suppose; but after years away, one notices more. I have been in the thick of it all this week. Everybody does not wait, like you and Jean, for leave to call before Sunday. Perhaps I should not have given leave in some cases—" with a slight curl of her lip. "I have had any number of callers: and they all seem convinced that the one object of my coming home is to hear how badly the world has gone on in my absence. The Dutton world I mean."

"So long as they keep to generalities—" and a pause.

"They do not. It is all about individuals."

"Such remarks may be checked, if one is resolved."

Evelyn's face wore a curious look, as if she were conscious of certain elements in the question which he had failed to grasp.

"Perhaps—" she said gently. And then—

"St. John's is unchanged, I hear. The shabby little boys still in full force!"

Mr. Trevelyan smiled, and drew cabalistic signs on the carpet with his walking-stick, while Jean listened and learnt. "I imagine that a good many elderly people would be distressed at changes in St. John's," he said.

"People who believe in the infallibility of sixty years ago: I never do understand that view of matters. Why must all that is done at a certain date in one's life be right, and every after deviation be wrong? Shall I come to the same way of thinking when I am old?"

"It is a not unusual result of age with ordinary minds."

"But may not people go on and learn more, instead of standing still? And don't the needs of different generations differ? Doesn't human nature take fresh developments from time to time, wanting varieties of help? I don't often talk like this—" and a restless caged look came into her beautiful eyes. "People would not understand. But surely truth as a whole is wider than it is made out by some such good people."

"Truth as a whole is wide as Him who is the Truth: and He is wider than the Universe which He has made. Our views of Truth may be narrow, but Truth itself is never narrow." Mr. Trevelyan spoke in a brief incisive style, and she smiled.

"Yes: that is what I meant. You understand. One gets a glimpse of how things really are sometimes—and then to come down to the little circles of good people, saying hard things of each other—But I shall be as bad as they, if I go on! We had better talk of something else. Tell me about your sister. Is she well? Busy as ever, I suppose. I want to see her the first day I can. Ah—here is my husband."

A nameless change crept over Evelyn, noted at once by the observant Jean. She looked up with a kind expression, a species of polite wifely welcome; but the smile vanished, and with it, her engaging sweetness. In a moment, the violet eyes grew weary, the lips satirical, the whole manner dignified and listless.

General Villiers came in quickly, with his military step and carriage; handsome still, though his grey hair had become white, and he was older in appearance by many years than the number of his summers warranted. Chronic ill-health is apt to age a man: and he had suffered much at times from rheumatism. He might have been easily taken for past seventy: and it was quite true, as Mrs. Kennedy had said, that he looked like Evelyn's grandfather. He had even begun to stoop a little. At the moment of his entrance, a distinct frown was stamped upon his brow, as if something had vexed him: but it cleared away at the sight of callers, and he came forward to greet them, with his air of polished courtesy.

The Trevelyan family did not belong to that "St. John set" which formed his own chosen environment when at home. As he would perhaps have said, they did not "suit him." He knew, however, that Evelyn liked them: and he was too affectionate a husband not to be pleased with what gave her pleasure, even though he might be just a little uneasy at the prospect of an intimacy in that quarter.

He was somewhat in bondage to the opinions of others; not of "others" generally, but of certain leading individuals in his own clique; Miss Devereux, for instance, and Lady Lucas, and Colonel Atherstone, none of whom liked or approved of Mr. Trevelyan. Where his own kindness of heart would have carried him on, he was often pulled back by a recollection of what others—these particular "others—" might say. Still, he

was a thorough gentleman, and small-talk went as smoothly as a glissade for several minutes, till Mr. Trevelyan rose to go.

"Jean must be sure to come again very soon," Evelyn said, kissing the girl; and Jean went off in a state of smothered radiance, which her father could not even guess at.

"My dear!" the General said seriously, when he and Evelyn were alone, speaking in a tone of reproof. He was a most devoted husband, as husbands go, but seven years of married life do undoubtedly, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, make away with the romance of attachment. Dearly as the General loved his fair young wife, he was not at all incapable of finding fault with her; and this premonitory "My dear!" did not come with the shock of anything unusual. It only came as something unwelcome: and her lips grew slightly hard.

"Yes—" she said.

"I think, my love, that now we are at home, you must make up your mind to be a little more guarded, more careful in your manner, when friends call friends of long standing."

"More guarded!"

"Perhaps that is hardly the word. What I mean is, that you have to be a little more kind and pleasant, my love, even where you do not so very particularly care for the callers themselves. It is necessary to guard one's manner sometimes from over-coldness, as well as from over-frankness. I am speaking early for your sake as well as for my own. I should be sorry if a wrong impression went forth of my wife; and you cannot, I am convinced, really wish to give offence. It is only inadvertence."

"Offence to whom, William?"

"It is hardly needful to mention names. I think you will understand without further explanation. You did not of course intend to act slightly to anybody; but a certain amount of attention is due to people in a certain position; and when it is withheld—can you wonder that they are hurt?"

"I cannot be otherwise than natural."

"Nay, Evelyn—surely politeness ought to be natural."

"I have not failed in bare politeness, and I will not," she said quietly. "But more is expected, and I cannot give it. I don't like Dutton people."

"You do not really know them. There is at least no need to pass judgment until you do."

"I have no wish to know them any better."

"Then I am to understand that your manner yesterday to some of my friends—a manner which gave pain—was not inadvertent, but intentional?"

Evelyn almost spoke, almost told him of the real cause. It was a pity that she did not. Though he might have been difficult to convince, he would not in the abstract have approved of gossip, and he would at least have seen that she had a reason for showing coldness.

"But what is the use?" she asked herself plaintively. "He will not understand."

She turned away with a sigh, making no answer, and the frown on the General's brow was stamped there during

many hours. He thought Evelyn was wilfully bent on opposing him.

It was difficult, perhaps, for him to think otherwise, when she would not attempt to make her motives clear; yet no doubt it was difficult also for Evelyn to enter on such an attempt, when she had so often tried and failed. The state of tension between them had grown gradually out of an utter discrepancy of mind and character, at least not less in degree than the discrepancy of age. In such cases, it is often most difficult to say where the blame lies.

For he was so good, so earnest, a man: and withal so fixed in his views. When he had made up his mind, he had made up his mind, and nothing could move him. This was a marked idiosyncrasy, a part of his very nature; and it was equally shown on questions of great moment and of passing interest.

On almost every conceivable subject of importance, he had come to definite conclusions some thirty or forty years earlier; and he had not since deviated by a hair's breadth, at least not consciously, from the neat solution of each difficulty, then laid down by himself for his own instruction. He was never troubled by a shadow of doubt that his opinions might not be absolutely and altogether right. He never thought it possible that here or there he might be mistaken. He had his Bible; he studied it; he reached certain conclusions. When other people, studying their Bibles no less earnestly, reached different conclusions, they of course were wrong.

He was too gentlemanly and kind-hearted to judge them harshly in words; but he always felt their deviations from truth, as held by himself, to be sad and perplexing; and he had no pleasure in their society. His friends were always

those who agreed with himself, who submitted to his dictum. All who did so agree, he accepted and believed in thoroughly; so thoroughly that, as we have seen, Evelyn was hopeless of her power to disturb that belief. All who did not so agree were relegated to the outer circle of mere acquaintances.

But he could not so relegate his wife: and Evelyn by no means agreed with him on all points. She made no effort to conceal the fact; and this was a lasting grief to the single-eyed simple-hearted man. For if he were inevitably always in the right, she must of necessity, where she differed from him, be always in the wrong.

Evelyn's mind and character were in many respects a complete enigma to the General. He could not fathom her; could not grasp the complexities of a nature so unlike his own. It was not his fault. A short-sighted man cannot fairly be blamed for not seeing so far as a long-sighted man.

The General, with all his real goodness and nobleness, had a narrow make of mind, a contracted mental vision. And at sixty-two or sixty-three years of age, he was incapable of gauging his young wife of twenty-five. She had not yet come to her full growth. She was expanding, gaining fresh knowledge, assimilating new thoughts, year by year. He had been petrified early into a permanent shape; and for thirty or forty years past, he had almost ceased to expand. How could the two minds suit?

Evelyn's restless thought, her searching into the foundations of statements which he accepted en bloc, her eager listening to fresh theories, her weariness of religious strifes and factious oppositions—all of these he resolved with sorrowful haste into "dangerous tendencies," and to all of these, he set himself in resolute opposition. He was

indeed most willing to discuss vexed questions with her; and he would never, like many men, forget his gentlemanliness in the heat of argument; but he always began and ended with the assumption that he himself was inevitably right, and he had no power to see her side of the matter.

So it came to pass that Evelyn fell into a habit of systematically evading all discussion; not merely all religious discussion, which under the circumstances was no doubt her wisest course, but all discussion of most everyday matters. If he found fault, she offered no defence. If he misjudged her, she attempted no explanation. It was "no use," she told herself. Such a state of things, which in any other relationship of life would be hardly more than durable, when existing between a husband and wife could not but result in distress and isolation.

CHAPTER IV.

A STRIFE FOR THE MASTERY.

"Fie, fie! Unknit that threatening unkind brow;
And dart not scornful glances from those eyes."

SHAKESP
EARE.

SYBELLA's exercise of authority over Cyril had reached the limit of her tether. The pull had been too strong, inducing a new resistance which, once started, was not likely to die down.

From childhood, the home training of the young baronet had been, in effect, "Do as you like; follow your own inclinations—" with the sole exceptions implied by the care of his health, and the choice of his friends. He was to nurse and coddle his body; he was to like those people whom Sybella liked; which two exceptions might involve the occasional crossing of his inclinations; but in all other respects he was to gratify himself.

Such a mode of training would naturally, would almost of necessity, recoil in time upon the trainer. Arbitrary exceptions to a general rule of self-pleasing are not likely to stand.

Boyish as Cyril looked, he was seventeen, a lad of innate character, of rapidly-developing force and intellect. Some degree of nervous weakness existed still, hampering the capabilities of mind and body, but the weakness was being fast mastered, as the bracing influences of a good school gradually counteracted the enervating influences of home.

Hitherto his natural gentleness of disposition, with a good-natured readiness to yield on small points—a readiness more often masculine than feminine—had prevented struggles; but the state of things could not last thus indefinitely. Sooner or later, as Mrs. Kennedy would have said, the tadpole is sure to part with its tail.

The change was not likely to begin on Miss Devereux's side. A mother is usually far quicker than a father to realise that

her children, especially her boys, are growing up; and she more seldom makes the blunder of keeping on childish restrictions too long. But Miss Devereux was not a mother, was not even a woman of natural motherliness. She was only a fidgety and nervous single lady, very ignorant of life, still more ignorant of human nature; and she was quite unable to realise that her spoilt darling was big enough to stand alone. She was just as eager to cosset, to pet, and to control, with the lad of seventeen as she had been with the child of ten. Since the change would not begin on her side, it had to begin on Cyril's side; and this mode too often means an accompanying struggle.

No doubt the change had been long brewing. Things do not come about in this world without previous preparation.

When a lightning spark flashes from cloud to cloud, it does so with startling suddenness yet the electrical condition of the clouds has implied a gradual working-up to the point of discharge. When nations burst into open war, a period of grumbling and growling has been gone through previously. What the newspapers describe as "strained relations" between two kingdoms had been for some time the condition of affairs between aunt and nephew; only nobody knew it except themselves, and perhaps not even themselves.

Like many easy-tempered people, who from inborn sweetness and dislike of a "fuss," will yield on a hundred lesser points, Cyril could be aroused to tough resistance on the hundred-and-first point. An occasional fight in his childhood might have warned Sybella; but such fights had been rare, and she had almost found him amenable to petting. On the whole, this factor in his character had not pressed itself on Sybella's notice. He was indeed only now beginning to awake to the dawning possibilities of manhood. Far greater awakenings might come to him in the future;

but this at the moment seemed great. It took him by surprise as well as her.

Though he had submitted to the combined pressure of Miss Devereux and Mr. Trevelyan, he could not easily forgive his aunt for the position in which she had placed him before Jean. There was the rub! Had Jean been absent, he would have cared little; he might have felt a touch of good-humoured disgust, still he would have stepped into the carriage, with at most only a laughing protest.

But before Jean!! To have to act the semi-invalid, and be carried off to dry his boots, with Jean standing there, slim and straight and scornful! He knew she was scornful, without looking at her; and his whole frame tingled at the thought. It quashed all recollections of Mr. Trevelyan's advice, which for the moment had carried the day against himself. He could only think of Jean, could only burn at the recollection of her pity.

He would not speak to his aunt all the way home; would not look at her; would not answer when she spoke. His violet eyes grew dark under bent brows, and the handsome lips gathered themselves into a resolute pout. In plain terms, Sir Cyril Devereux sulked. He had never been a sulky boy; and Miss Devereux did not know what to make of this new phase in his nature.

She had not sense to leave him alone to recover himself. A little quiet neglect might have restored the balance, allowing her time to regain his temper: but whatever else Sybella might do, she never failed to talk. She reasoned, argued, coaxed, remonstrated, without a break. When he would not reply, she nearly cried. When he would not look at her, she rambled on about ingratitude. When at length

she had him inside the hall-door, she told him it was all the fault of his friends that he should behave so badly.

"If it wasn't for those Trevelyan—!" she lamented. "I'm sure nothing could show more plainly that Jean is no good companion for you. And now, Cyril, about your boots—"

But she had put the finishing stroke. Cyril's unwonted fit of sulks exploded into a no less unwonted outburst of anger.

"If it hadn't been for Mr. Trevelyan, I wouldn't have come back at all," he declared wrathfully, and he dashed headlong upstairs, three steps at a time.

Sybella hesitated, debated with herself as to what dignity might demand, and followed the fugitive. She found Cyril's door open, Cyril's room empty; and from the window she caught one glimpse of a boyish figure cutting at full speed across a distant lawn.

"He must have gone down the back staircase! And without changing his boots! How wrong! How deceitful!" bewailed the distressed lady; though deceitful was scarcely the correct term.

Cyril's rush upstairs had been instinctive, his rush downstairs unpremeditated. He had merely escaped by the easiest method.

"I shall have to take stronger measures. He has never shown such a rebellious spirit before. So strange and unlike him—it really is most sad. Standing alone, as I do—with no one to appeal to—except of course General Villiers, and he is entirely managed by his wife."

Sybella did not show profound knowledge here, but she would have maintained the statement through thick and

thin.

"I really am quite at a loss what to do. Of course one can see whose influence has been at work. Yes—come in."

"Lady Lucas is downstairs, ma'am."

Sybella had to smooth her ruffled plumage, and to hasten to the drawing-room, where Lady Lucas sat on the chief sofa—a large woman, plump and round, and clothed in black brocaded silk, almost stiff enough to stand on end. In youth she had been pretty, but her features had expanded with her frame into a rotund shapelessness, and the distinguishing characteristic of her countenance was its extent of cheek. There was also a superfluity of chin, though not of forehead, and her eyes were surrounded by cushions, which left only two slim crevices when she smiled.

She was the very picture of dignified geniality greeting Sybella with effusive affection; and the effect of her effusiveness was to call forth the gush always latent in Sybella, albeit trampled under feet by an irresponsible world. Sybella aught sigh, and clasp her hands, and gaze with appreciative eyes, to any extent, in Lady Lucas' presence.

Tea came in, and Sybella poured it out in a vague and poetical manner. She forgot the sugar, and then the cake; and she blushed and sighed over her own mistakes, pleading absorption of mind.

Lady Lucas had no objection to absorbed minds in the abstract. Indeed she thought it rather interesting to see Sybella go off into a mild dream, with clasped hands, and eyes riveted on the top-point of the banner-screen; but she was too old fashioned not to like sugar.

"No innovations for me, my dear!" she said magisterially, when Sybella offered the sugar-basin, and she helped herself to three big lumps. "Tea was meant to be taken with sugar. Leaving it off is all a fad of the present day."

The saccharine question disposed of, they reverted to topics of local interest, and divers affairs pertaining to other people were settled by the two ladies. Sybella had not meant to say anything about the perversity of her nephew, being well aware that what was told to Lady Lucas was told to Dutton. But her mind was full of the subject, and the outlets from Sybella's mind were always badly corked. A very moderate amount of steam-pressure within would at any time get rid of the corks.

So presently the whole story came out, not to say more than the whole. A story told by any one is pretty sure to take its colouring from the condition of the teller's feelings, and Sybella's feelings were not calm.

Lady Lucas listened, questioned, sympathised.

"There is nothing for it but firmness," she maintained, removing a crumb from her brocaded silk. "You must hold your own, my dear. It is a question of now or never. I know what young men are in the present day. If you yield now, you will never have the upper hand again."

"So difficult!" sighed Sybella pensively.

"Not at all. Not in the least difficult if you set to work in the right way. To begin with, I should certainly check that intimacy, if I were you. No end of mischief comes from boy and girl intimacies, where there is no relationship. I would check it at any cost."

"But how is one to check it? I should be glad enough if I could," persisted Sybella. "Of course it is most undesirable! Still, I don't know what to do. If I were to forbid him the Rectory, I am rather afraid—and it would give offence too—"

"If you were to forbid him the Rectory, you would settle the matter at once, my dear. Nothing in life but the Trevelyan family would be of the slightest importance," said Lady Lucas, with considerable wisdom. "No, things have gone much too far for that. You can't stamp it out—now! You can only try to draw him in some other direction."

"How?" Sybella begged to know, for once with brevity.

"Don't leave him time for the Trevelyan family. Keep your eye upon him, and have all possible engagements apart from them. Mrs. Villiers would surely help you. No? I should have thought, the General's wife—Well, if no other means are successful, I would take the boy elsewhere for his holidays. I would not have him at Dulveriford more than I could possibly help, till his fancy for Jean has died out. For Mr. Trevelyan! Oh, my dear, I know better! I know what boys are. It is Jean he is crazy after, not Mr. Trevelyan. You really are very innocent still of the ways of the world!"—playfully.

Sybella bridled and blushed anew at the compliment.

"Now you think over my advice. At Christmas you may have to be at home—it may be unavoidable—but Christmas holidays are shorter, and people can't rove about in the fields all day. Summer is the time to have him away. Take him abroad or anywhere—only not here. He will be at College, I suppose, in a year; and think of the length of his summer vacation then. You must keep him out of Jean Trevelyan's way for two or three years; and see what the

effect will be. Don't fan the fancy by fighting, but fill his mind with other interests."

Sybella did not dislike the notion. It would take a little time to work its way into her brain, but she by no means rejected the scheme. A few difficulties occurred to mind, all of which her companion overruled or smoothed away.

By the time Lady Lucas said good-bye, Sybella was much more than half convinced.

Tea grew cold, and Cyril did not come in. Sybella began to wax nervous. What if she really had gone too far, had driven the boy to desperation? Worse ideas than wet boots began to assail her—such as maimed limbs, and drowned bodies. Why Cyril should be maimed or drowned, in consequence of what had passed, she could hardly have explained; but whoever expected sequence of thought from Sybella?

She put on her garden hat at length, took a shawl, and meandered about the grounds for half-an-hour; in vain. Cyril was not to be found. Then she confided her anxiety to Pearce, and sent him forth to search. Pearce did not agree with her as to the necessity, but he did what he was told; and after an hour's walk, he returned, having seen nothing of Sir Cyril.

Dinner-time drew near. Did Cyril mean to fail for dinner? That would indeed be a startlingly new departure. Sybella melted into tears at the prospect, then she grew pettishly angry, and then she cried again. It was impossible to settle to anything. She wandered from room to room, looking out of windows, wondering what could be done next.

A click at the front door sounded, and Cyril came in suddenly. Sybella was passing through the hall, and she

stopped short, with an exclamation, half relieved, half reproachful.

Cyril stood facing her, white and resolute, yet shamefaced. He had never treated her in this fashion before, and he did not know what to make of himself any more than Sybella knew what to make of him; but all promptings to softer feeling were checked again and again by the remembrance of how she had abashed him before Jean. He was stiff as steel on that point, worked up to rigidity by hours of brooding. Still, a touch of shame was visible.

"Cyril!! At last!!" she said, any number of notes of admiration in her voice. "Where have you been?"

"Walking!" curtly.

"Not all this time! And your boots! You did not change your boots!"

"No, aunt."

"Cyril, this is very wrong. This really is most, reprehensible. I could not have thought it of you."

Unyielding silence answered the reproach, and Sybella's voice began to shake.

"I could not have believed in such behaviour. It is too bad—too ungrateful! But of course, I understand what makes you so unlike yourself. I quite understand. It is all the fault of those Trevelyanys! The effect of being thrown too much with Jean! I am sure if I had thought—But I have been too kind—too indulgent! One finds one's mistakes—I shall have to take measures—strict measures! Lady Lucas is right! The thing cannot go on."

Be it remarked, Sybella had studiously resolved to say nothing of all this, to make no allusion to the Trevelyan family; above all, to utter no hint respecting Lady Lucas' advice. She did not wish to warn her nephew, or to annoy him afresh. Sybella's resolutions were, however, apt to fail when the moment came for carrying them out.

"It is all the fault of those Trevelyan family," she went on in her usual style of aimless repetition. "I suppose they have been setting you against me. And Jean—Have you been there again?"

"No!"

Little though Sybella knew it, a kind and grieved word on his first entrance—such a word as a mother might have spoken—would have softened him at once into his ordinary self. He was dead-beat with hours of vehement walking and indignation, just in the state to be melted by any touch of tenderness. His pale lips might have told their tale to Sybella, but she was far too full of her own annoyance to be observant. The above utterances, the contemptuous expression "those Trevelyan family," the unjust accusations levelled against his friends, hardened him afresh. Sybella was losing an opportunity, not likely to return.

"Then where did you go?"

"Through the marshes."

Sybella lifted horror-struck hands.

"You are soaking wet—up to your knees. Almost up to your knees."

"Yes."

Sybella burst into tears, overcome by this new masterfulness of spirit in her coddled darling. "I'm sure I can't think what has come over you, Cyril. You are not a bit like yourself. Jean Trevelyan—"

"I shall get ready for dinner," Cyril broke in coldly, and he walked out of the room, cutting short the renewed accusation.

Dinner was an uncomfortable meal for both. Cyril was far too chilled and too much fatigued to have any appetite; and Sybella was too greatly offended to speak on any subject except that of his misdemeanours, which could hardly be discussed in Pearce's presence.

She had meant to carry on her lecture during dessert, but Cyril declined all dainties, and Sybella resolved to make haste to the drawing-room, where interruptions were not likely.

On the way, however, she was delayed by a note from Mrs. Kennedy, requiring a verbal answer, and when she reached the drawing-room, Cyril was dead-asleep on a low couch—not lying down, but dropped in a careless heap. He looked so young, and withal so sweet, with the long even lashes lying on his cheeks, and the half childish lips parted, that Sybella's mood softened. She sat and watched him till coffee came in, and then, after rousing him to take a cup, her lecture resolved itself into—

"Cyril, you ought to go to bed."

"I don't mind if I do," Cyril said, with unlooked-for submission; and after a good-night kiss, he vanished.

But the kiss was a cold one. Sybella's accusation of Jean could not be easily forgotten.

Sybella was in her element next day; and all her foreboding cares were rewarded; for Cyril had a cold. She could indulge herself to any extent in that most ardent delight of a small mind—the reiteration of the formula, "I told you so!"

Had she not warned Cyril? Had she not prophesied results? Had she not begged, implored, insisted? And had he not refused to hear? Now the consequences had arrived—just as she had known, just as she had expected, just as she had declared would be the case!

"I told you how it would be!" she said again and again, with her grating self-satisfaction.

There could be no mistake about the matter. Cyril came down to breakfast, hoarse as a raven, sneezing, heavy-eyed, feverish and listless. He did his best to talk in a natural voice, but the effort was a failure.

And every time he coughed, Sybella said "Ah!" expressively.

She was so gratified with her own sagacity, as quite to have recovered her good-humour.

All breakfast-time, she plied Cyril with questions. Had he a pain here, a feeling of tightness there, a kind of oppression within, a sort of chilliness everywhere? Had he—

"Ah! There!" as Cyril sneezed.

Poor dear boy! Well, he would have to stay indoors, of course, and take care of himself. Nothing like nipping a cold in the bud, especially in summer when of course there are

draughts everywhere. A little prudence earlier would have prevented all this; but now—yes, the best plan would be to stay quietly in the study, with the window shut, and a nice little story to read. And he must have broth and toast for lunch; and a horrible camomile compound such as "my dear aunt always gave me when I had a cold;" and then if he did not get better by the evening, "I must just send for Dr. Ingram."

Cyril stoutly rebelled. He had begun to feel his power. He had had the bit between his teeth yesterday evening, and he began to champ it again now. It was impossible to forget so soon his aunt's contemptuous utterance of the Trevelyan name. He knew also that Jean might expect him to look in and inquire after the robin.

He did not mention Jean, but his lips took an obstinate curve, as he answered, "I'm not going to be boxed upindoors all day."

Sybella declined to hear the protest. She talked on through breakfast; she reiterated warnings past, causes present, results future. She discussed Cyril into the Study; she shut and bolted the window; she gave him a pretty story-book; she pitied his hoarseness; she fidgeted to and fro; she went verbally through a list of remedies; she threatened Dr. Ingram anew.

Finally she disappeared to attend to household duties; and when, half-an-hour later, she came back, carrying for her invalid a hot treacle posset, which after much circumlocution of ideas she had decided upon as superior to even the camomile compound—lo and behold, the bird was flown.

"Yea, ma'am, Sir Cyril is gone out," Pearce said, when Sybella had poured upon him a small cascade of questions and sentiments. "He didn't mean to be long, he said."

"He will get a fresh chill. He will be laid by with inflammation of the lungs! Another attack of congestion!" gasped Sybella. "So wrong—so thoughtless!"

"It's an uncommon hot day, ma'am," averred Pearce, with a glance at the August sky.

"But damp—quite damp. The air is full of damp," declared Sybella. "See what an amount of dew on the grass. Dew always means damp in the air," she went on scientifically.

Like most unlearned people, Sybella was positive in proportion to her ignorance.

"Where else could the damp come from? And damp is the worst thing possible for a chill. If only you had told me sooner, Pearce!"

"Sir Cyril didn't give me no time, ma'am. He just said he was going to get a breath of air, and then he was off like a shot."

"Imprudent boy! Those Trevelyan again!" sighed Sybella, too much agitated to be circumspect.

Cyril had to pay for his wilfulness—not in the coin of ill-health, but in that of endurance. Sybella made known her views to him very fully on the enormity of his conduct; and a lecture from Sybella was apt to be, not loud perhaps, but long.

He did not get inflammation of the lungs, as she had foretold, and in a few days the cold vanished. Yet

consequences even more momentous flowed from the doings of those two days. Thenceforward there were changed relations between the aunt and nephew. A slowly-widening chasm appeared, separating the two. Unquestioning submission on the part of Cyril ceased; and a struggle for authority on the part of Sybella began.

CHAPTER V.

IN THE GORGE AGAIN.

"But 'tis done—all words are idle—
Words from me are vainer still,
But the thoughts we cannot bridle
Force their way without the will."

BYRON.

ONCE more Jem and Jean were in the gorge, not rushing headlong down the steep path, but walking steadily up. Jean could have raced as lightly the one way as the other; only she held herself in for the sake of her companion. Jem was overworked and out of condition. He had come to Dulveriford for rest, arriving late the evening before.

This sharp ascent was about as much as he could manage, taking it easily. There is no great practice in hill-climbing to be had at the East-End. Jean's quick eyes noted the occasional pauses, which were not only for admiration of the scene. He had lost his healthy tan, gaining instead a fixed paleness; but the face at twenty-nine was handsomer than at twenty-two. It had grown finer and more refined. The nobility of deep thought and the purity of self-abnegation shone through every feature.

Seven years since he had walked through this gorge.

The former time was vividly present with Jem. He found himself unexpectedly haunted by recollections of the fair girl, whom he had last seen here. Seven years at his age are a considerable slice out of a lifetime; and Jem had long ago risen out of the despair into which he was plunged by Evelyn's engagement to General Villiers. He could look back now, with a kind compassion, to his own misery of mind at that time, almost as to the misery of another person; and he could feel a friendly interest in Evelyn's welfare. He had ceased to dream of her in connection with himself. His life was full of thought, full of work; it was a life entirely devoted to the good of others; and so of necessity it was a joyous life.

Yet somehow he had never managed to fall in love a second time. Evelyn Devereux had been his first and only love. That one short episode had tinged his whole being. Evelyn Devereux, his love, was dead; but Evelyn Villiers would always be to him "a bright particular star."

All these seven years he had not been to Dulveriford. At first he had purposely stayed away, in dread of associations, in dread still more of seeing Evelyn, and so renewing the misery of loss. Later, he had not been free to come.

During five years past he had toiled, with every power of mind and body, in a great East-End Parish, rising to the position of Senior Curate—a man esteemed and beloved by all who knew him. He was in touch with his brother clergy, in touch with the working men around, in touch with the mothers, the children, the sick, the poor. Dominated in his uttermost being by the love of Christ, intensely loving and lovable himself, he won the love of others, and through their love for him, he led them to a nobler life, a life of service to the Muster whom he served. But the doing of this meant no easy-chair existence.

Offers of livings had come to him, not once or twice only. Jem was, however, in no haste to change. He delighted in his present sphere; and he cared little for advancement.

Once a year, generally in spring or early summer, he went for a month to Scotland, to recruit his much-tasked energies. At other times he could seldom be spared; and when he had a few days, his mother wanted him. Two or three times he had met the Trevelyan family at Dulveriford in Scotland, when his holiday had happened to coincide with that of Mr. Trevelyan: but Dulveriford, he had not seen, declining all invitations.

This year his annual change had, from one cause or another, proved less successful than usual; and the advent of hot weather knocked him down. Jem struggled on till August; then doctor and friends insisted on another rest. An invitation from Dulveriford Rectory, coming at the right moment, was accepted.

Jem had not known, till after his arrival, that General and Mrs. Villiers were at home again. The knowledge would have made no difference as to his coming; for he counted himself completely cured of that long past suffering, able even to smile over it. Yet, walking through the glen once more, amid the surroundings of golden water, flecked leaf-shadows, sunshine and rocks, Jem experienced something like a transient revival of the old pain. He seemed to see Evelyn's face at every turn; to meet again the fringed black-blue eyes turned full upon him in wondering delight.

"Is it too far? Shall we turn back?" asked Jean, when Jem paused again near the rustic bridge, to lean against a tree.

Jem smiled at her. "You must give me a day or two to get up my powers," he said.

Jean did not pester him with solicitude. She had been trained to despise fussiness in the health-line. To be ill at the Rectory was almost a crime; not in the sense in which Sybella Devereux made it a crime, by always ascribing it to the sufferer's own imprudence; but bodily weakness was something to be ashamed of, something to be hidden and trampled under foot.

"Do you remember the last time you and I were here?" asked her companion.

He could not get the recollection of Evelyn out of his head. It was, however, a soft recollection, not unpleasing, though sad; and he could quite well bear to talk of her.

"Just after General Villiers was engaged to Cyril's sister," Jean answered promptly.

"General Villiers told me of the engagement here—in the gorge."

"Yes; I heard him begin, and I ran away. Aunt Marie had been so vexed, because I came upon her and my father talking about it. Aunt Marie didn't like her to marry somebody so old."

"You were a funny little girl in those days." Jem looked attentively into the grave face. "Jean—I should like to see you laugh more."

"Would you? But there is nothing to laugh at."

"Never?"

"Oh, sometimes—when people do odd things. Not often. Why should one be always laughing?" asked Jean, with girlish solemnity. "I don't think life is so very funny. It is

worse than funny. There are so many things that one can't understand."

"What things?" Jem moved to a fallen log, and sat down, motioning Jean to do the same.

"A great many. There are no end of puzzles."

"Tell me one of them."

Jean considered, and came out abruptly with—

"I never do see how Evelyn could marry General Villiers."

"Hardly needful for another person to see, if she cared for him enough."

"No—but—" There was a singular echo of Jem's "if" in Jean's expressive face.

"And we have not to settle that point."

"No—but—" a second time, followed by another pause. "No: of course. Only I don't see how one can help wondering. Evelyn is so unlike everybody else; so beautiful and clever. Oh, 'clever' isn't the word. She is much more than clever."

"Intellectual."

"Yes; that is more what I mean. She seems to have such a—I don't know what to call it! She takes everything in, and thinks everything over; and then it comes out quite different, and so fresh. I'm not explaining myself properly. My father says she is original. And General Villiers isn't the least original, or clever, or anything. He is only good."

"That is a very important 'only.'"

"Oh, but don't you understand? One ought to be good, but one ought not to be only good. It shouldn't be just mere commonplace goodness."

"It ought to have a distinct character of its own, in each individual," suggested Jem, not a little interested in the play of Jean's face.

"Yes; I suppose that is what I want to say. My father always talks of General Villiers as such a 'very good man;' and it sounds to me as if he said it because he had nothing else to say. But I don't think one loves people merely because they are good—does one? At least I don't. There are numbers of good people that I can't love at all. I suppose I like their goodness, but I don't love themselves, because there doesn't seem to be anything in them to love."

"Or if there is something, Jean does not see it."

Jean was silent for a minute, and her next words might have seemed disconnected with her last. They did not so seem to Jem. He had the clue, and he could supply the connecting link.

"Evelyn was only two or three years older than I am now when she married. Only just eighteen—and he was the same age that my father is now."

"A considerable difference!"

"Cyril says people drift into things and can't help themselves."

"Cyril has had immense experience, no doubt."

"Then it isn't true?"

"Some people are weak enough to let themselves drift; but nobody need. Mind that, Jean."

"If Evelyn drifted into marrying the General—"

"Yes?" as Jean came to a stop.

"She must be very sorry now. That is what I have been thinking. Because it wouldn't be enough, I should think, to have a husband who was only just so very good and nothing else. And he doesn't care for the same things or the same people that she does. He never reads the books she likes most . . . Evelyn often looks as if she were sorry. She looks as if—I don't know exactly how to put it—only there's a look in her face, as if she did so want something else, something more than she has. He is very kind, of course; but still—I shouldn't think she was so very happy."

Jem rested his forehead on his hand. Jean's words brought a curious sharp sense of pain; literal pain darting through his temples, symbol and fruit of an acuter pain below. The pain was for Evelyn, not for himself. He was not thinking of himself, or of his own loss. Personally he had nothing to do with Evelyn Villiers, whatever he had felt for Evelyn Devereux. But, if Jean's conjecture were true—if that fair creature's life had been marred by hasty action, before she was old enough to judge for herself, Jem hardly knew how to face the thought. It seemed to him so very possible, and so very terrible.

If Evelyn were happy, he could rest in the consciousness of her happiness, going his own way peacefully enough; but if she were not—How could he rest, knowing her to be miserable, while he was powerless to help? "Miserable" is a strong word; but if love and sympathy were lacking

between the husband and wife, what could it mean less than misery for either of them?

Jem's pulse throbbed with the picture which unconscious Jean had conjured up; yet he spoke quietly: "Jean, you must take care how you say such things."

"I wouldn't, to anybody accept you. I never do. But I can't help seeing: and it is true."

A good ten minutes of silence followed. Jean rose and went to the edge, gazing down upon a swirl of dark water in the rocky bed below. Jem remained where he was. He had to quell a rush of fierce longing to ask more, to find out more, to learn how things really were with Evelyn, to know if possible only that she was happy. He craved nothing further, but that he did crave, passionately, bitterly—just to know that she was happy!

The peace of years was suddenly broken up, and a whirlpool of the old suffering had him in its grasp. There was nobody to see, for Jean's back was turned; and had anybody else been present, there was not much to be seen. At the ten minutes' end, Jem had mastered himself.

He came to Jean's side, only a little paler than usual, to say, "Don't go too close to the edge. You would have a poor chance if you fell over."

Jean retreated two steps obediently. "But I am never giddy," she said. "Cyril can't stand there. It makes no difference to me."

"You have strong nerves."

"I've always lived here, you know. Shall we go on now?"

"I don't think I can walk much further to-day. Stupid of me, isn't it?" said Jem cheerfully. "I'm a little—tired, perhaps. So, on the whole, we may as well turn back."

It seemed like a dream to Jem. He could hardly believe his own eyes, when, as they came down the path, two people advanced towards them from below, passing out from the tree-shadows as once before. It was almost on the self-same spot that the encounter took place. Jem and Jean were not rushing now, however. Jean was no longer a child, but verging on womanhood; and Jem had lost some of his buoyancy; and twice seven years might have passed over the General's head.

Evelyn was perhaps the least altered of the quartette; or so Jem thought at the first moment. She appeared hardly less young or less lovely than the picture stored in his memory. Yet the next instant, he saw that she, too, was changed—not only developed into fuller beauty and more womanly grace. Development had not taken place merely along the lines that might have been expected. The faintly satirical set of her lips was altogether new; and the eyes—those wonderful violet eyes—no longer shone with delight in the world around her, but were full of a sad forlornness, as if she had come to the end of her life, had tasted all it had to offer, and had found that all unsatisfying. Jem understood now what Jean had meant.

The four stopped, of course, and exchanged kind greetings.

General Villiers was delighted to see Jem. "I meant to call on you this afternoon," he said, "but we met Mr. Trevelyan, and my wife has asked him to bring you in to dinner to-

night. Just a family dinner—only one or two others. You will come, of course. Mr. Trevelyan could not promise for Madame Collier."

"Thanks, I shall be much pleased," Jem answered.

"Why not give us three or four nights before you go back? We should be delighted," urged the General.

"I don't think I can. I'm afraid I shall have to hurry away, even sooner than I meant."

Jean gave him a look.

"Thanks, all the same."

"So you have secured a peep at the glen the first thing," remarked Evelyn. "Is it not curious that we should meet again just on this spot, after so many years? Do you remember?"—with her gracious smile. Then she asked, "Have you been ill lately? I had not heard of it."

"Rather out of sorts. Yes—I remember! Seven years ago."

"Only seven. It seems so much longer. I could believe you if you said 'seventeen years!'"

General Villiers looked down on her with a smile. "That would make you a good deal older than you are, my dear," he said. He was proud of her youthful beauty, and never sought to hide the discrepancy in age—which, indeed, would have been a hopeless task. "Now, with me the years slip by in a marvellous way—like lightning. Almost as soon as a year begins it is gone. Seven years! Impossible! But Mr. Trevelyan looks older."

Evelyn's glance went again to Jem with kind solicitude. "He looks—not at all well," she said.

"East-End work takes something out of a man," Jem said, in apology for his appearance.

"You will not keep on at that always. You will have a living some day," said the General.

Jem might have told of several rejected livings.

"Some day, perhaps. One would wish to give one's best years to that work—and then—"

"But not to go on too long," suggested Evelyn. "Not to use up all your powers."

"They could hardly be used up to a better purpose."

"No—only—" she hesitated, dropping her voice, as the General turned to speak with Jean. "Oh, I understand! It must be a splendid life—a life worth living."

"It is a life worth living."

"So different from most people's lives!" and the deep blue eyes, which for a moment had kindled as of old, went forlornly to some far distance, with a listless sadness which struck home to Jem like a keen stab. Then they came back to him, kind and anxious again. "But you do look too much overdone. You must remember your friends."

"My love, we have not much time to spare," the General said. "I suppose we can hardly ask Mr. Trevelyan to come again with us to the bridge."

"He said he was tired," put in Jean.

"I am sure he is. Oh no; we shall meet by-and-by. He ought to go back now," Evelyn said at once, and they parted.

Jem made no effort to decide the matter for himself.

Few words were spoken on the way home. Jean gave a questioning glance now and then, of which Jem seemed unconscious. He was absorbed in his own thoughts. They did the remaining distance at a good brisk pace, never slackening speed. But when the house was reached, Jem all at once succumbed, seeming to be utterly wearied out. Jean had never known him so before, and she saw with a sense of dismay. To be scolded by Madame Collier for not taking better care of her cousin was a new experience, in a house where nobody ever thought about health; but Jem's exhaustion was something new also.

He had found his way to the drawing-room sofa, and there it seemed most merciful to leave him undisturbed. None in the house could guess at the real cause of his prostration—could know how the haunting vision of those sad violet eyes never left him for a moment. Jem saw them continually, whether his own aching eyes were open or shut.

"I'm sure I don't know what's to be done. He doesn't seem fit to go," said Madame Collier, when six o'clock came.

Jean would hardly have been more startled by the fall of a stack of chimneys than by the implied doubt. Not go to dinner at the Park! Memory failed to supply any precedent in the shape of a broken engagement. If a Trevelyan undertook to do something, he did it at all costs and hazards, short of absolute impossibility.

"I don't know what he really wishes, or what is the matter with him. He is tired and has a headache, and he can't or won't say more. Do bring him to a point, Jean, somehow. I

wish he had not been so far this morning: but one could not guess, and it had no business to knock him down like this. Your father ordered a fly, for we didn't suppose Jem could manage the walk; and it will be here soon after seven."

Jean went to the drawing-room, wondering. Flys were not a common indulgence at the Rectory. She found Jem in the deep easy-chair near an open window, with his hand over his eyes. Jean's step was light as of old, and he seemed unconscious of her entrance. She stood looking at him for some seconds.

"Aunt Marie thinks you don't want to dine at the Park," she said at length.

Jem's sudden movement was as of one awakened from a dream. "It's no matter," he said.

"But if you are too tired—" Jean paused, astonished at her own words. Nobody at the Rectory ever thought of leaving a matter undone, merely on account of fatigue.

Jem did not at once reply. He was leaning back, quiet enough outwardly: and Jean could not see through the shield of composure. She could see the pale and drawn look: she could not know how intense was the craving to judge for himself as to Evelyn's happiness. The whole force of his desires pointed in that direction. But there was another side to the matter. Jem needed all his powers for his work: and if one glimpse of Evelyn's face had so destroyed his calm, how would things be after a whole evening in her presence? Might he deliberately risk it? Would it not be wiser, better, to keep away? For he could do no good. If Evelyn were not happy, he had no power to touch her unhappiness. Seeing her thus could only mean distress to himself, not gain to her.

Jean stood waiting, perplexed at his indecision; and as his hand went slowly over the rumpled hair, she began again—

"If your head is so bad—I mean, if you think you had better not go—"

"It is bad. Yes—I think I had better not go."

"Stay at home! Must you?" Jean had not expected this; and she was a good deal disappointed in Jem.

"I am afraid I must."

"It isn't walking, you know. The fly is ordered. And Evelyn will expect you. Wouldn't going do you good?"

Jem could truly answer, "No, I think not." He added in a gentle voice, which Jean knew to be decisive—"Tell aunt Marie I will give it up. And, Jean, I wish you would explain something else. I am sorry, but I find I can only stay two more nights here."

"You are not thinking of London again so soon."

"No."

Jean moved away without a protest, and gave her double message.

"Well, it can't be helped, though I know your father will be vexed," was Madame Collier's comment. "There's something wrong with Jem that we don't understand. Go home in two days! That he will not. He has heard something from somebody by post, I suppose. It doesn't matter. We won't let him off any of his week."

But when Jem knew himself to be in the right, his will was unbending as iron. After two nights, he left and he did not see Evelyn again meantime.

CHAPTER VI.

FRICTION.

"If two lives join, there is oft a scar,
They are one and one, with a shadowy third,
One near one is too far."

R. BROWNING.

MRS. VILLIERS of Dutton Park was a marked personage in Dutton; partly from her husband's wealth and position, partly from her own personal charms. Her actions were watched and commented on to any extent. Where she drove, how she dressed, what she said, thought, and did, became matters for daily chit-chat. Above all, whom she called upon, whom she chose to welcome, and whom she treated with coldness, were questions which stirred the neighbourhood—more especially that part of the neighbourhood which belonged to the congregation of St. John's.

General Villiers was looked upon as the exclusive property of the St. John's clique; and where he belonged, his wife of course belonged also. How could she help it? He always occupied in Church one of the few carved chancel chairs, and Evelyn occupied a second by his side—an enviable distinction not to be accorded to everybody. When he stood up, martial and handsome, he was a fine specimen of the "old soldier," and he spoke out the responses in a deep bass voice, while his face was illuminated with earnest feeling, the sincerity of which none could doubt.

Evelyn, standing by his side, looked lovely and graceful, of course, for she never could be anything else; but nobody could help noting her air of habitual weariness, more especially during the sermon. Mr. Kennedy always preached for half-an-hour, sometimes more, on no occasion less. Whether or no his brain happened to contain matter enough for a thirty minutes' discourse, thirty minutes at least the congregation invariably had. Now a sermon, like a gas, is capable of indefinite expansion; but also, like a gas, a sermon grows thinner through stretching. That which might be a forceful little address, when compressed into fifteen or twenty minutes, becomes too often thin and weak when pulled out to fit thirty or forty minutes.

The congregation generally did not object. These soothing effusions, lengthily spun out, suited them—or at least suited their taste, which is not quite the same thing—and since they thoroughly accepted Mr. Kennedy, they were loyally willing to accept any amount of sermon from him, wholesale and without criticism. But to this state of mind Evelyn had not attained; and she chafed beneath the weekly infliction, making little effort to hide what she felt, and thus becoming a subject for animadversion. To add to the displeasure of the clique, she only came to St. John's when her husband

came. If he were kept in by rheumatism, she wandered to Dulveriford Church.

Evelyn cared little what might be said, since she cared little for Dutton people. If any murmur reached her, she smiled her faintly satirical smile, and went on, unmoved. Why should she shape her life to suit the notions of Lady Lucas, or the Atherstones, or a dozen other people, whose very existence was a matter of indifference to her? The only friends she had in the place were the Trevelyans.

General Villiers had shown displeasure more than once at her persistent coldness to those whom he most favoured. He loved his young wife intensely—not, of course, with the romantic worship of courtship days, which could see no fault in her; but with a deep and tried affection, far transcending hers for him. It is not too much to say that he would willingly have given his life for hers, any day. Nevertheless he was keenly conscious of a certain independence of will, which would not submit to his dictation; and, as we have seen, he did not scruple to tell her plainly when he counted her in the wrong, though never with harshness.

"My love, I wish you would arrange to see a little more of Colonel Atherstone and Miss Atherstone," he said one day in the beginning of December, speaking with his air of gentle authority. He had been incited to this, of course, and of course quite unconsciously on his part: for he was a most transparent man, and very much under the dominion of others, without being in the least aware of it.

Evelyn's wifely instinct divined or guessed both facts. She did not blame him for the first, because she understood the second. She had complete trust in his chivalrous honour. That any person should venture directly to blame her to him was a thing impossible in her eyes. Her affection for him

was far more akin to that of child for father, than of wife for husband; and it was often buried under a pile of rubbish, resulting from everyday friction; but her trust was undoubting. Nor was that trust misplaced. Yet—and Evelyn knew it—others could turn him to and fro, without his knowledge.

"I am afraid it is sometimes remarked," he went on, "that you hold aloof from them. You are so often engaged when they call; and you never receive them with any warmth. I do not ask you to give up your friends, Evelyn, but surely I have a right to expect kindness to mine."

"Anybody except the Atherstones," she said.

"Nay, Evelyn; why?"

"I cannot endure them."

"You do not give yourself the opportunity to become acquainted—"

"I am too much acquainted already. Anybody rather than them! I can get on with Lady Lucas, for she is a perfect lady. I could not make a friend of her, but we are on civil terms."

"Civil terms!"

"I mean, we are all politeness. We discuss the weather, and we don't yawn. But none of that set suit me."

General Villiers wore a look of displeasure. "I should not have expected you to call my friends by such a term."

"To call them a 'set!' Is there any harm? I thought all Dutton was divided up into sets and cliques. William, I do

try to be polite to the Atherstones when they come; but I can't do more. I cannot make myself like them."

"I wish to ask them in to lunch one day soon. To-day is Monday. Will Thursday suit you?"

"If you like," she said coldly.

"You will write the invitation, of course. To lunch, quietly—by ourselves."

"I would rather have some one else to meet them."

"No—I think not this time. In fact, I have promised the Colonel that we would be alone. There are matters that I wish to talk over with him."

"And I am to have the pleasure of Miss Atherstone's interminable gossip."

Evelyn spoke scornfully, and the General sighed, feeling the state of things to be deplorable. He was conscious of a widening gulf between himself and his wife. They could scarcely talk now on any subject without a jar. If only she would have submitted herself to his dictum on disputed points, all would have gone with such delightful smoothness; but this was far from being the state of the case.

He had an odd liking for the hugely-moustached Colonel, whose loud voice and boisterous laugh were so in contrast with his own gentlemanly quietness. Such likings are difficult to understand. The Colonel could talk down all Dutton, and he did not know the meaning of refinement. He was broad and stout, plain-featured and roughly resolute, and he would trample with an iron heel on the opinions of all who differed from himself. He loved nothing better than

to decry the doings of Bishops and Clergy, with a slap-dash and jaunty vehemence, surrounded by a circle of listeners, and he would handle recklessly the dearest beliefs of others, caring nothing whatever for the pain he gave.

This it was which utterly repelled Evelyn. Strange to say, the General could listen and not disapprove. He would never himself speak thus; but he would permit and condone harshness, even coarseness, in his friend. Evelyn could only look upon the Colonel's power over her husband as a species of bewildering fascination.

Thursday afternoon happened to be a free time with Jean, and as she had not seen Evelyn for some days, she started for the Park. The sky looked threatening; a sharp frost had set in; and Mr. Trevelyan foretold snow; but Jean cared little for weather. She was secure of a welcome from Evelyn, and secure of an escort home, if she should not return till after dark.

Light of foot and light of heart, she sped briskly on her way. The bitter cold and the half frozen slippery fields were nothing to her young vigour. She had a great joy ahead, for Oswald would be at home for the New Year. Oswald was in the Army now, a fine young man, Jean's pride and delight. She firmly believed that no such promising subaltern had ever been seen in the Service before. Oswald's choice of a profession had been something of a trial to Mr. Trevelyan, who would have wished his only son to follow in his own steps; but he was the last man to use pressure for such a result.

Had it not been for the delight of Oswald's coming, Jean might have felt slightly flat. She had just heard that Cyril would only be at home for a week this Christmas.

"The dear boy had a cough," Miss Devereux said—anybody else would have called it "a scrape." And she meant to give him a few weeks at Bournemouth.

Lady Lucas had recommended change, and change was so good for a boy of his age. Perhaps in the summer she might take him abroad. Lady Lucas thought it would be a good plan. Even now, Sybella always wanted somebody else's opinion to bolster up her own.

Evelyn was alone in her boudoir when Jean entered, and there were traces of tears on her face. Jean asked no questions. It was not her way to show a solicitude which might be unwelcome. She pulled off her thick ulster, and sat down to talk about Oswald's coming.

Generally Evelyn liked to hear about Oswald, because it gave her pleasure to see the glowing sunshine in the sister's eyes, when his name was spoken; but to-day her attention wandered past control; and Jean soon dropped her own affairs, waiting in silence for Evelyn to take the initiative.

For a good while the silence lasted, unbroken. Evelyn was doing nothing, not even pretending to work. She only sat gazing into the fire with eyes which had their largest and saddest look. Jean had often seen her so before; and usually the mood would pass off in talk upon other matters. To-day she seemed unable to converse; and Jean, after waiting a reasonable time, took the initiative herself.

"Has something worried you very much?" she asked, in her direct serious style.

"The Atherstones have been here to lunch."

"Yes." Jean knew that they were not favourites with Evelyn; and she could not wonder.

Since the Colonel in public and in private systematically opposed and abused Mr. Trevelyan, it was not surprising that Jean disliked him. Mr. Trevelyan could afford to smile with grim unconcern: but naturally his daughter felt for him.

"One has to invite them sometimes. But it makes—such a day! When they go, I feel that I must be alone for a few hours to recover myself. I gave orders that only you might be admitted this afternoon. If anybody is offended, it can't be helped. O Jean, I get so tired, so tired, of these people."

"Of the Atherstones?"

"Of them most. When they have been with me for an hour, I could think I had been under the incubus for ages. Does that sound silly?" Evelyn pressed both hands over her face. "Jean, why am I so easily upset? Why can't I carry it all off, and be indifferent?—Not dare what anybody says or thinks? I am vexed with myself for being so worried—so like a naughty child! Do you know the feeling? I don't know how to be good or patient to anybody to-day."

"You are never naughty to me."

"Am I not? That is because you never rub me the wrong way. If you could have heard the talk, talk, talk, at lunch, about our neighbours' opinions, and our neighbours' errors, and the wickedness of everybody except ourselves! It makes me wild. You mustn't think—My husband never says such things. He never could, never would. But somehow, he doesn't see or understand when others do it. And those people are past endurance!"

Jean was not given to caressing movements; yet her hand found its way to Evelyn's, and was held fast by the white feverish fingers.

"I wonder why your touch is so quieting. You always do me good. O Jean, I am so tired!" She sank back in her chair, pale and listless. "Sometimes I almost feel that I can't go on living at Dutton—that I must get away. My husband likes it so much, and he hates travelling; but I would give anything to be on the move. One is more free abroad. It is such a narrow rut here—always the same people, and the same ideas! And the cliques, and the gossipings, and the party fights—I am sick of the whole!"

CHAPTER VII.

AN UNWILLING WITNESS.

"The world goes up, and the world goes down,
And the sunshine follows the rain;
And yesterday's sneer, and yesterday's frown
Can never come over again,
Sweet wife:
No, never come over again."

C. KINGSLEY.

"INDOORS, my love? That is right. It seems disposed to snow," observed General Villiers, entering the boudoir half-an-hour later. "Miss Trevelyan here!"

"Snow!" repeated Evelyn, turning to the window. "How pretty! Look, Jean—such great soft feathers. Yes, Jean has been here some time. I shall keep her to tea, and let Walters see her home. You are not going out, William?"

"I have a little business to attend to. It will not take very long."

"But your rheumatism—"

"That has been better lately. I am well wrapped up, and the snow does not seem much. Exercise is good for me. Are you better now, my love?"

Jean turned to the fireplace, making believe to find some object of interest on the mantelpiece. Something beyond common husbandly solicitude underlay the simple inquiry.

Jean's perceptions were very keen. She had caught one glimpse of the General's bent head and tender gravity of demeanour, one glimpse also of Evelyn's lifted remorseful face. More than that she would not see; but she could not close her ears. There was the sound of a hushed kiss, and then a murmur. Jean longed to run away, but she felt it essential to keep her back turned; and the most she could venture on, was a slight rattle of the fire-irons, to cover a possible answer.

"You are sure you won't take cold?" she heard Evelyn say next, in a stirred tremulous voice.

"No fear, dear. I have to go to the Ricketts'—yes, the cottage on the border of the wood. Not so very far. I shall be back by six o'clock, I hope."

The General came forward for a good-bye shake of the hand with Jean, so she had to face about, somewhat discomposed. Evelyn seemed to cling to her husband's side.

"Good-bye. Pray stay as long as you can with my wife," General Villiers begged, with his stately courtesy. "I shall count it a kindness. She has been rather over-fatigued to-day—not quite the thing."

"Jean will not hurry away. She does not mind weather," said Evelyn.

"I should love to be caught in a storm," asserted Jean.

"It is no storm yet. I do not know how things may be by-and-by. Well—good-bye, my love, for the moment. Keep yourself warm, and try to rest."

"I'll try, and—William—"

Evelyn clung to him, white as a sheet, with wide sorrowful eyes, and there was the sound of a sob.

It was of no use for Jean to pretend now not to see or hear. She could only stand in constrained silence.

"William, I am so sorry! You were so good to me! I'll try not to behave so again! Say you forgive me."

"My dearest!" and the General folded her slight figure in protecting arms; for the moment almost as oblivious of Jean's presence as Evelyn was careless of it. "You are overstrained," he said, kissing her brow. "I must not let you

do so much. Miss Trevelyan will take care of you now for an hour or two, and when I come back—My dear one, don't fret! You did not mean anything, I know—" in a most audible masculine whisper. "Another time, perhaps—Yes, I quite understand—My own dear little wife! Yes, come to the door, and see me off."

Jean was greatly relieved when the two vanished. She drew a breath of vexation at having been so uncomfortably placed, and walked to the window, where growing darkness was lighted by a ghostly glimmer of white feathers, trailing slowly earthwards.

As she looked, a gust of wind set the feathers swirling in complicated circles; then it died away, and they dropped again with soft deliberation. Jean thought of her two miles' walk as of something delightful to come. She heartily enjoyed a battle with excited elements.

Evelyn returned soon, with moist wistful eyes, and a red spot on either cheek.

"O Jean, he is so good—always so noble and true! If only other people were like him!" Two large tears fell heavily. "I have been so cross to him to-day—before you came! As if he could help the Atherstones being what they are! And it is just his real goodness and humility which make him not even see how different they are from himself. I am sure Colonel Atherstone's way of laying down the law, and riding over everybody, would make any other man angry—but not my husband."

Jean was taken by surprise. She had not expected this little outburst of wifely enthusiasm. It was all true, no doubt. The General was most good: a noble nature in many respects. To be sure Evelyn did not always show so vivid an

appreciation of his fine character; but nothing could be more desirable than that she should appreciate him. If a man's own wife is not awake to his merits, he stands a poor chance. Jean knelt on the rug, studying this phase of affairs in the firelight.

"He is very kind," she remarked moderately.

"Yes, you like him, of course. You could not know him, and not like him. But you do not know my husband fully, Jean. Who can—except myself? There are a hundred things that people never hear. He is so ready to take trouble for anybody. And so perfectly honourable—he never could stoop to any of the little mean things which other men do stoop to—even good men sometimes, not thinking. It is such devotion to what he feels to be right. He would give up everything to-morrow—I am sure of it—if there were any question of sacrificing his principles. One must admire such a spirit. And all these years so good to me—so patient! Even when he finds fault, he only does it because he thinks he ought—not from temper."

Jean's glance spoke admiration, not for the General at that moment, but for Evelyn herself. Evelyn failed to decipher it.

"He ought not to go out in such weather as this. It is very bad for him. There is a poor man, ill and in trouble about his rent. Our agent seems to have been hard on him; and the man is taken worse in consequence. My husband will not let him pass another anxious night; and he will not send any one else, because he doesn't understand the rights of the case."

"Couldn't he have the carriage out?"

"The horses are not rough-shod. This frost has taken us by surprise, and we did not mean to drive anywhere, so my

husband thought we would wait a day to see if the cold lasted."

Evelyn sighed. "I wish I had not let him go. Suppose he takes a bad chill?"

"But why should one expect it?"

"I don't know. I have had such a feeling this afternoon of some trouble ahead. Do you know what that is? It comes sometimes and lasts for hours, and nothing happens, and then I laugh at myself; but when it comes again I am frightened. I never felt so when I was a girl—only the last two or three years. It was that which made me beg my husband's pardon just now—a kind of dread. I had worried him, and he is so kind and good. When he held me in his arms, I kept thinking, 'Suppose he should never hold me so again?' Why does one have such fancies? I often do, and they lead to nothing—but they might."

"If one is always expecting trouble, one is sure to be in the right some day, because troubles do come sooner or later," said Jean, with severe common-sense.

"That is so like you," Evelyn said, with a sad smile. "But one can hardly reason away such feelings. I suppose they are partly physical—when one is not very strong. I wish he were safe back. Jean, I think we will go to the library. Walters will bring tea there presently. You don't mind staying with me a little longer? The snow seems getting very thick—but I feel as if could not bear to be alone. You won't leave me yet?"

"O no: and I don't mind any amount of snow," Jean could truly answer.

Two hours passed, and Jean was still at the Park, for she could not quit Evelyn. General Villiers remained absent, and Jean had resolved to wait till he should appear.

Not that there was the slightest cause for anxiety, she told herself. Though the wind howled, and the snow fell heavily, it was not a storm of exceptional violence; and though the General was an elderly man for his years, he could be counted well up to a four or five miles' walk.

Jean did not stay on the General's account, but for Evelyn's sake. They had had their tea long since, and Evelyn had walked up and down the library, as a vent to her restlessness, till strength failed. She was leaning back now in an easy-chair, every muscle in her fair face tense with suppressed agitation. She seemed equally unable to endure conversation and silence.

"Sit close to me," she whispered, if the girl moved. "Jean, let me feel you close!" came repeatedly; yet when Jean spoke, she hardly responded.

Jean was perplexed whether to look upon the mood as purely nervous, or whether to conjecture some possible reality in it. No doubt, real foretellings of trouble have been at times experienced; but, on the other hand, Evelyn had frankly confessed to such experiences on her own part as usually without result; and when genuine result does follow, one still has to allow for coincidence. Whatever else the mood implied, however, it meant suffering, and Jean was always tender to suffering.

"Jean, what o'clock?"

"Half past six. That is nothing. The wind would hinder anybody."

"You are so wise and logical."

"Isn't it best?"

"Perhaps—yes. But logic won't do away with this feeling, the dread of some evil ahead. When it comes it always terrifies me, even though it so often means nothing. I am not superstitious; but don't you think warnings are sometimes sent?"

"I am not sure that they may not be," said Jean slowly. "Only—they would be true; and you say that this feeling is often mistaken. But if you are so worried, why don't you send Walters to meet General Villiers? He might be glad of an arm, now the wind is strong."

"Oh, thanks—the very thing! You practical girl! Yes, please, ring."

She roused herself into something like animation when Walters appeared—a middle-aged slow-mannered man, of stout and heavy build. He listened attentively, looking from one to the other.

"Ricketts! Yes, ma'am! On the border of the wood. Which way, ma'am?"

"Are there two ways? The path across the marshes? General Villiers would not attempt that in such weather. The road, of course; and go as quickly as you can, please."

Then they waited again. Seven o'clock came; half past seven. Evelyn had the dinner put off till her husband should arrive; but she consented to take a glass of wine and a biscuit at Jean's urgent request. She had not dressed as usual. Jean could not; and Evelyn would not go upstairs.

Though pale, Evelyn was braver now—now when Jean began to feel that some cause for uneasiness really did exist. Suppose General Villiers had missed his way in the blinding snow? This was not absolutely impossible even on the high road. A false turn might have carried him far out of his route, before he discovered his mistake, and might mean some risk of chill for an elderly man. As for the footpath across the marshes, Jean scouted the idea as absurd. No man in his senses would choose such a path on such an afternoon, even though the high road might mean nearly a mile farther round.

Till close upon seven the snow continued to fall, and then it ceased. Jean, periodically visiting the window, to peer through curtains and blinds, reported breaking, clouds, and presently a gleam of moonlight.

"I shall have a lovely walk," she said cheerily. "If General Villiers has taken shelter in some cottage, he will be able to get home now."

"Jean! There he is!"

Evelyn sprang up with a rare impulsiveness, and ran into the hall. Her cheeks and eyes were brilliant with joyous relief. Jean thought she had never seen her look more lovely.

The front door had been left on the latch by Evelyn's order, and as it opened, they were both at hand. A cloaked figure stepped in, shut the door, shook off soon loose snow upon the mat, and looked at Evelyn. She stood as if turned to stone.

"Father!" Jean said in amazement.

"I thought you might be glad of some one to see you back, if—"

There was an ominous pause. He took Evelyn's cold hand, and the stern set of his lips relaxed.

"My husband!" she said faintly.

"Then he has not come home yet?"

"No. O tell me—"

"I think you had better sit down. You are trembling," said Mr. Trevelyan.

He drew Evelyn's hand within his arm, and led her back to the chair she had left. Without such help she could hardly have reached it. "Your husband has been to the Ricketts' cottage."

"He left us at about four o'clock, and he meant to be back before six," explained Jean.

"Yes: I called to see the sick man, and General Villiers had been there before me."

"How long before?" Evelyn asked.

"He started to come home at five o'clock—"

"Two hours and a half ago!"

"Mrs. Ricketts told me that he seemed spent and out of breath when he arrived. She begged him not to stay long, as the weather was getting worse; and she offered to send her boy with him, but the General would not hear of it. She saw him struggling against the wind before he disappeared. It is not unlikely that he may have turned aside and found

shelter somewhere. But the snow is over now. I have come direct along the road. Walters arrived before I left the cottage."

"He had not met my husband?"

"No. General Villiers may have tried the short cut, and—found it difficult," said Mr. Trevelyan cautiously. "It would not be wise; still, if he felt over-fatigued, he might be tempted. Walters and young Ricketts have gone that way, and I have promised to meet them with Adams."

"In case help is needed."

"If he has lost the path—yes. He might be too exhausted to get on. I met Adams outside, and I told him to be ready at once with lanterns—feeling sure you would excuse the liberty. Walters does not profess to know the geography of the marshes, and young Ricketts unfortunately is lame just now from an accident, so they may not get very far. Jean will stay here and take care of you."

"Thanks—I am coming too."

Evelyn stood facing him, a bright flush on either cheek.

"You! Pardon me: it would be madness! You do not know the marshes on a night like this. Stay indoors, Mrs. Villiers, and be ready for your husband when he arrives. You could do no good whatever—only hinder us."

Mr. Trevelyan's manner was uncompromising to sternness. He thought nothing of a buffet with the gale for his hardy Jean—brought up from infancy to fight through any manner of discomfort in the path of duty; but such exposure for this fair porcelain-like creature, always tenderly sheltered, was another matter.

"I shall not be a hindrance," she said resolutely. "You don't know how much I can do and endure when there is need."

Mr. Trevelyan was not convinced. He thought the scheme an insane one, and he told her so again in plain terms. Delay was much to be deprecated, yet he did delay to urge her compliance.

When, however, in place of opposing her will to his, she laid pleading hands on his arm, and lifted beseeching eyes to say—

"Please, please, let me go! I cannot stay at home any longer! I think it will drive me wild!"

Then he gave in.

Perhaps Evelyn was the only woman living to whom he would have yielded in the face of his own judgment; but what man could ever withstand her?

"Well," he said, "it is not wise, but if you are bent upon it—Yes, you may come too, Jean. See that Mrs. Villiers is well wrapped up. The wind cuts like a knife. Would your husband allow this?" he asked of Evelyn.

"It is for him," she answered. "If it were for anybody else, I would ask his leave. Come, Jean—we must be quick."

Evelyn was all life and energy, as she donned a fur-lined cloak and beaver hat. Jean fastened her dress higher, insisted on the stoutest boots within reach, and wound a woollen cloud round throat and chest.

Jean's own substantial footgear, close-fitting ulster, and cloth cap, were well adapted for such an expedition.

Evelyn's fears seemed almost to have departed, and she smiled at Jean's precautions.

"My dear, there is no need. I never take cold," she said.
"But you shall do as you like. How good your father is to let me go! Nothing is so dreadful as to sit still, doing nothing, when one is anxious. Jean, ask Mr. Trevelyan whether we ought not to take a little flask of brandy? My husband might need something of the sort."

Mr. Trevelyan had thought of this already. Adams, the head-gardener, was waiting, and in three minutes, they sallied forth.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON THE MARSHES.

First Br. "List, list! I hear
Some far-off halloo break the silent air."
Sec. Br. "Methought so too: what should it be?"

MILTON.

EVELYN was strung up to a condition of mind which would admit of no difficulties, which for the moment, could

scarcely be conscious of fatigue. The cold blast came sideways, happily not facing them direct; and though very strong, it was not quite so biting as an hour earlier.

"We shall have a quick thaw," Mr. Trevelyan said tersely, noting the difference.

In a general way, Evelyn would have found advance not easy, but now, though she gratefully accepted his offered arm, she seemed scarcely to notice the wind. Mr. Trevelyan was firm as a rock against the roughest blasts; and Jean sprang ahead with a light step of positive enjoyment.

For awhile they followed the high road; but presently a gate led into a large meadow; and beyond this meadow were the flat low-lying marshes, clothed like all else in a robe of virgin white.

The clouds had now almost dispersed, and a nearly full moon shone out, slaying the lustre of all stars in her neighbourhood, and lending a weird beauty to the landscape. But for the cause of this expedition, Jean would have been enraptured. Even as things were, she silently revelled in the exquisite fairy whiteness, to which the moonlight lent a silvery shimmer, unearthly in its purity. No feature in the scene looked like itself, and distances were altogether delusive in that bewildering white shine.

Though short, the snow-fall had been heavy, and the footpath was obliterated. A smooth surface stretched in all directions, broken by the dark lines of deep dividing dykes, which cut up the whole marshland into small meadow-squares. In summer, the dykes often contained only a low layer of water, but now they were full nearly to the brim with recent rains; and interlacing ice-needles had begun to dress the water-surface in a slender skin, even while the

deep mud, underlying the snow on the dyke-banks, was scarcely hardened.

The footpath led through these meadows, either straight across or diagonally, and passed from one to another by a natural earth parapet, which had been left standing when the dykes were dug, just wide enough for a path, rough and dirty at the best of times, and now a mere mass of snow and half frozen slush. Moreover, at each crossing was a stile, held in position by a few upright wooden palings on either side of itself. Some of the stiles were very high and awkward, even when neither bars nor earth were in such a slippery condition.

These stiles, with their black supports, rearing their heads gloomily from the white snow, served to point out the route, since the footpath itself was undiscernible. They alone, beside the dykes and an occasional small bush, relieved the monotony of the pure carpet everywhere outspread. While the moon shone, it was not difficult for the walkers to shape their course from stile to stile, keeping note of their bearings. But when the moon had been hidden by a dense pall, and snow was heavily falling, things must have been widely different.

Mr. Trevelyan felt this strongly, though he would not suggest it, when Evelyn remarked—

"After all, if he did cross the marshes, he ought not to have gone wrong. I think he must have taken shelter somewhere, nearer home."

"You will not consent to go back now?"

"Go back! O no; not yet. We must meet Walters first. Where can he be?"

"He may have left the path to explore elsewhere. We shall probably come upon his traces soon."

They left deep footprints themselves at every step, in the soft new snow. It was heavy walking; yet Evelyn pressed on courageously, and Jean still sprang lightly in advance, like a young gazelle, seeming almost to skim the white surface.

A thick cloud passed over the moon, and instantly the whole scene was plunged into funereal darkness; only a ghostly gleam of white being reflected from the ground to mingle with the reddish light of the lanterns.

Evelyn shuddered, and said, "What a difference!"

While again, Mr. Trevelyan pictured to himself these marshes two hours or more earlier, in the white darkness and bewildering flurry of the snowstorm.

"There is Walters!" Jean's quick eyes were the first to see a far-off glimmer. "Look! A lantern!"

"H'm! A good way from the path," muttered Mr. Trevelyan.

"Oh, they have a reason—they must have a reason for going," exclaimed Evelyn. "Can't we get to them quickly?"

"Not that way. We can't go straight across the dykes," said Jean. "Even if father and I could leap them, you couldn't. I don't think we ought to leave the path yet."

"Jean is at home in these marshes," observed Mr. Trevelyan, as Evelyn looked at him. "We could not have a better guide."

"Father—" Jean stood, deep in thought.

"Yes."

"You know where a path forks off, not far from the wood—just after the beginning of the marshes. If General Villiers took that turn by mistake, he would soon get entangled among the dykes—not able to find his way out. He might be somewhere not far from where Walters is now. Perhaps Walters has thought of that—or Ricketts, more likely—and so they have gone to see. We must get round to them the same way, by the other path. O come!"

Jean hastened over the snow with a speed which Evelyn could not equal, even helped by Mr. Trevelyan; and once or twice their eager guide was called in, again to press ahead.

"Take care, Jean! Mind what you are after!"

"O look!" came the same instant, in Jean's soft bell-like tones. "Walters has turned off here at right angles across the marsh. Here are his footsteps and Ricketts' too. What made him do that? I don't know how they have crossed the dykes. Walters is too heavy to jump, and Ricketts, now he is lame—No, no: they've had to come back. Here are their footmarks again. They've gone round by the other path, after all, as we are doing. It's the only way, I know, on a night like this. Look how the lantern swings—as if they were trying to make signals."

"My husband," whispered Evelyn.

"If I was to go nearer, sir, and shout to them?" suggested Adams from behind.

"It would be a waste of time. No, Miss Jean is right, Adams. We must keep to our path. The turn is not distant now. If Mrs. Villiers—"

"Don't think of me. I only want not to be a hindrance. Shall we reach Walters this way, Jean?"

"O yes, soon. It is only going round, instead of trying to leap the dykes. She could never manage that, could she, father? I don't think it would be pleasant for any of us in this dim light, with the banks so slippery."

"Jean is more at home in the marshes than I am myself," said Mr. Trevelyan, as Evelyn's eyes again appealed to him. "She and the boys have explored every inch of them, I suppose."

Evelyn was beginning to flag, despite her best efforts, and Mr. Trevelyan doubted whether she could go much further: but he only gave her all possible support, while Jean, free and unencumbered, kept in front. Another cloud obscured the moon, and Jean's slim figure vanished.

"Take care what you are after," called Mr. Trevelyan. "You have no lantern. If you come on a dyke suddenly, you may be in."

Evelyn shivered.

Then the cloud passed, the white landscape was flooded anew with silver, and presently—

"Father!" exclaimed Jean. "Father! This way—take the turn! Look here!"

She was kneeling on the snow, peering under a small bush; and as they came near, she sprang to meet them, holding out a silk pocket-handkerchief. "I can't see the initials. Is this his! It had been blown under shelter of the bush, and so the snow couldn't bury it. If it is his—"

Evelyn took the handkerchief with a trembling hand, and examined the corner, close to the lantern. "My husband's," she said.

"Then he has taken the wrong turn and gone this way."

"Clever girl," Mr. Trevelyan could not help murmuring. "Lead on, Jean. Remember, the handkerchief may have been blown from a distance. However, our business now is to reach Walters. Take my lantern, if you like. Adams will light us. But don't go too far."

"If he has been all these hours wandering among the marshes—" whispered Evelyn. "And no possible shelter—"

"It would be exhausting," assented Mr. Trevelyan. "But I hope we shall be in time to prevent ill effects."

They pressed on; Jean still the leader, showing a sagacity which would have fitted her for a mountaineer's or a backwoodsman's life. Soon they saw a lantern and two dim figures advancing, and when within hearing distance, Mr. Trevelyan shouted—

"Found anything?"

"No, sir! Nothing."

Evelyn stood still, conscious of failing power. "May I rest one moment?" she asked.

"Ah! I was afraid—" Mr. Trevelyan checked himself, for reproaches now were useless. "Lean all your weight on me, Mrs. Villiers. So—your whole weight. I must not let you sit down. It will pass off. Don't speak for a minute, but keep up a brave heart."

She sighed inaudibly, and closed her eyes. Mr. Trevelyan stood like a rock, supporting her; and the two men came up. A few words were exchanged. They had searched in vain for traces of General Villiers, and had themselves become what Jean called "entangled among the dykes," losing their bearings, and unable to find the path they had left. Walters was not at home in the marshes, and Ricketts was by no means a brilliant youth. Jean's approaching lantern had been their guide.

"No use going farther that way, if you have hunted thoroughly," said Mr. Trevelyan.

They had done so, Walters averred—thoroughly. "All along the dykes, and all round about, everywhere."

"Through the furthest corner of the meadow beyond the second dyke from here?" promptly asked Jean, indicating the direction.

There was a pause. No, they had not ventured quite so far. They had only taken a look at the said corner.

"It was an awful bad bit to get over," Ricketts said solemnly. "The General could never have taken that way, sure! The stile was leaning to one side, the path almost broken away; and the piece of marsh beyond was enclosed with dykes—no second way out of it."

"Father, may I see?"

"Yes! You know what you are about. Only take care. After that, we must get Mrs. Villiers home."

Jean moved off, and Ricketts, a big awkward boy, straggled uncertainly in her rear. Like most of the poor in Mr.

Trevelyan's parish, he adored Jean, looking upon her as a creature of another sphere.

Mr. Trevelyan despatched Adams to the Ricketts' cottage, to make sure that General Villiers had not meantime found his way thither; and he kept Walters by him with the other lantern, till Jean should return. They could follow her swift sure movements by her lantern, as she climbed the nearest stile, and struck across the snow beyond.

Then Evelyn roused herself. "Thanks," she said. "I am so sorry to be a trouble. I think I was faint for a minute. I am better now. Where is Jean?"

"She will be back directly. She has gone to take a look beyond where Walters was."

"Gone alone! Are you not afraid? I don't know which is the most wonderful, you or Jean. Suppose she were to slip into the water? O do come too."

"Perhaps you had better move; you will be getting chilled. Gently, there is no hurry," he said. "When Jean comes back, I am going to send you and her home."

Jean did not return quickly. The three went over the first dyke, Walters leading; and then they followed Jean's small footprints. A minute later, Jean's voice rang out from the distance, clear and thrilling, with a new sound in it.

"She's found something," Walters exclaimed.

"Father! Come!" The distant appeal cut like a blade through the air, yet Jean did not scream.

"Will you wait here with Walters? I must take the lantern. Don't stir till I come back."

"O no—I must go too."

To pause for discussion was impossible. The second dyke had to be reached and crossed, and the crossing, it could not be denied, was "awful bad." Mr. Trevelyan lifted Evelyn sheer over the stile, and all but carried her through the half knee-deep slush beyond—slush just enough frozen to be slippery, not enough to keep them from sinking into it. A false step might have plunged both into the dyke; but the other side was reached, and Jean came to meet them.

Mr. Trevelyan knew in a moment—knew as his eyes fell upon Jean—what had happened. He had never before seen her thus. Every trace of colour had left her face, and the eyes looked out fixedly from two surrounding hollows which had suddenly sprung into existence. Yet Jean was herself, which means that she was not thinking of herself.

"Not Evelyn!" broke from her blanched lips, and she clutched Evelyn's hands, as in a vice, with ice-cold fingers. "Father—you and Walters—over there—not Evelyn! O not Evelyn!"

"Why not?" Evelyn was perfectly composed now, not nearly so pale as Jean.

"I can't tell you! Father, don't let her! Don't let her!" cried Jean, in smothered agony. "Keep her away! Don't let her go!"

"Jean, dear, I am not a child to be made. Your father knows me better. Tell me, have you found him?"

"If you would but wait—till the others have been—"

"No: I am going on."

Jean's arm fell with a despairing gesture. Then she grasped the lamp which Walters held, thrust it into her father's hand, muttered hoarsely—

"Come—after us—" and led the way with Walters, urging him vehemently to a speed far beyond Evelyn's powers.

Mr. Trevelyan, fully understanding, did his best to hold Mrs. Villiers back.

So Jean and Walters arrived first at the spot, where General Villiers lay, face downwards, on the snow-covered grass, which here sloped a little into the almost full dyke. He seemed to have fallen thus, exhausted, overcome with cold, and his face was buried in the half frozen mud.

Jean by herself had struggled in vain to move the prostrate figure, but Walters could do what she had failed to accomplish. When Evelyn came up, her husband lay asleep, as it might be, on a winding-sheet of pure snow, "like a warrior taking his rest," calm and silent; while Jean knelt beside him, wiping away with her handkerchief the mud which still clung to the sealed eyes, the rigid and purple lips.

"My poor master!" groaned Walters.

Evelyn did not at once grasp how things were, or, if in her heart she knew, she would not at once accept the truth. A mist over the moon had thickened into cloud, blotting out most of its light, but now the cloud rolled on, leaving a clear landscape. The quiet face could be seen plainly—hardly paler than Jean's. Evelyn's glance went from the one to the other.

"He is found!" she said; and putting Mr. Trevelyan aside, she went forward alone.

"Then he lost his way, as Jean thought. And Jean has found him!—Jean!" with an accent of wonder. "Has he fainted? We must get him home quickly. He is so cold—only feel him! Cannot we give him—something—do—something?" uncertainly, as if she did not know what she said. "William, dearest! Dear—I have come to you."

Jean, shaken by the shock of her discovery, could not endure this. One hard sob broke from the girl's lips, racking her whole frame in its struggle to escape, and startling herself at least as much as others.

"Jean!" her father breathed, and she had herself in hand instantly; but that slight sound had done the business.

Evelyn looked across, with a dim smile, full of anguish.

"Jean!" she said. "Why—Jean—"

Then she swayed slowly forward and fell, prone and senseless, upon her husband's body.

CHAPTER IX.

BROUGHT HOME.

"Life and Thought have gone away
Side by side,

Leaving door and windows wide;
Careless tenants they!"

"All within is dark as night:
In the windows is no light;
And no murmur at the door,
So frequent on its hinge before."

TENNYSON.

WHETHER he had simply lost his way in the storm, and had wandered to and fro among the marshes, finding himself again and again turned back by intercepting dykes, till so exhausted that when he slipped and fell, he had no strength to rise; or whether some undetected heart-weakness, rendering him unfit to cope with the icy gale, had resulted in sudden failure of the heart's action, who of those present could say? All was over, long before they found him.

He had died, it would seem, a painless death, even though in some measure, a death of suffocation. He had met the great change suddenly, quietly, in pursuit of duty, in an act of unselfish kindness. The look in the dead face was not as of one conquered, but as of one victorious. To such a man as General Villiers, living habitually in the presence of his God, death, however unexpected, could not in effect be sudden, since he was always ready for it.

Jean would never in future years forget those few minutes, when she stood alone beside the lifeless body. She had not, it is true, any very strong liking for the General personally. He had been kind to her in a ceremonious fashion, and she had looked upon him as the inevitable appendage to his wife, whom she passionately loved—not in all respects a

satisfactory appendage, viewed with Jean's fastidious eyes, because she privately counted that he did not fully appreciate Evelyn.

Perhaps the parting between husband and wife, witnessed by her that afternoon, had somewhat shaken this aspect of matters. In any case, the General had been a familiar figure in Jean's life; a fine figure always, manly and gentlemanly; and to see him thus was terrible—lying dead on the cold white snow, bathed in the cold white moonlight, with the cold white marshes around—while not another human being was near. There lay the pull. We are so constituted that the mere fact of somebody near, at such a moment, is a help—even though the somebody may be powerless to assist.

Had a mere child stood by, the chill of that icy solitude would not have entered, as it did, into the very depths of Jean's organisation. Her actual grief was, indeed, for Evelyn, not for herself; but nine-tenths of what Jean suffered in life always had been and always would be for others: and the suffering was no whit less keen on that account. Rather, it was more keen, because more pure and noble in kind.

Evelyn's fainting fit did not last long, and when she rallied, the native force of her character at once asserted itself. Instead of giving way to a display of grief, adding to others' difficulties, she stood resolutely up, insisted on walking, and decisively set Mr. Trevelyan free, as well as Walters and Adams—the latter having returned—for the heavy task before them. Ricketts had been sent to the cottage to procure a shutter, and if possible, additional help. To convey such a weight over such ground would be no light matter; and a man lodging there, but seldom back till late, would probably be in by this time. The lad's own lameness rendered him of small avail.

"Jean will give me her arm. I want nothing more," Evelyn said steadily. "Only Jean, please. I shall not faint again. You must not think of me at all. We will go on, and—you will bring him home—quickly, please!" with unutterable entreaty.

Even Mr. Trevelyan's stoicism was not proof against her look.

"If—if anything can be done—" But she did not finish her sentence, for she knew as well as he that it was too late, that nothing whatever could be done.

The Rector's eyes were full, nay, wet all round.

"I cannot thank you!" she said. "I owe you—so much! Come, Jean, dear."

That walk always stood out before Jean in after life, as one of the worst experiences she had ever had to go through. Her most pressing desire was to keep Evelyn well ahead, that she might not see aught of what went on behind. There was to be no delay. Mr. Trevelyan and the two men would start at once with—it—alas! No longer him—hoping soon to meet coming aid, which indeed would be needed.

A whisper from Mr. Trevelyan urged Jean to haste; and Evelyn herself probably felt that she had not strength to endure the sight. She made no effort to hang back, and never cast a glance to rear. Weary she must have been, and the fixed face was white as snow in the moonlight, yet she walked swiftly, unfalteringly, making no hardship of the stiles, scarcely pressing on Jean's arm.

No words passed between the two for the greater part of the way. Even when they encountered young Ricketts and

the lodger, bearing the shutter between them, it was Jean, not Evelyn, who begged them to make haste.

Evelyn only shivered silently. Jean bent her whole attention to guiding Evelyn's steps, to giving all possible support: while Evelyn seemed to be hardly conscious where she was or what she did.

Not till the marshes were left behind, not till the large final meadow between marsh and high road were reached, did Jean venture to say—

"If you would only lean upon me more! You must be so tired!"

Evelyn's answer, not an answer in reality, came as if wrung from her: "O Jean, if I had been different! If I had only been different! If I had never given him pain!"

Jean dared not go into that question. She could trust neither herself nor Evelyn, after all they had gone through. She knew by Evelyn's shortened breath and failing steps that tears were streaming; and it was only by a fierce bracing of her own powers that she could force herself to say in everyday accents—

"I think you might make more use of my arm. We shall soon be at home now. Are you very wet?"

"I don't know."

To keep Evelyn to her earlier pace was no longer possible. She fell into a slower and slower walk, till Jean began to fear that the sad procession behind must surely overtake them. The high road was left, but the ascending avenue-path through the Park grounds taxed Evelyn to her utmost. It was all she could do to drag one foot after the other, and

more than once she came to a complete pause, swaying feebly, as if on the verge of another swoon.

Jean urged her on with touch and voice, and Evelyn responded in renewed efforts; but when the front door was reached, and Evelyn stumbled up the two steps, Jean knew that she could have done no more. Anything more deathlike than her face, as she came into the lighted hall, could hardly have been imagined.

The housekeeper, Mrs. Stowe, stood there, and with her Miss Devereux; the latter, as a matter of course, talking, the former listening. News of the General's disappearance having reached Sybella, she had driven at once to the Park, determined there to remain till the mystery should be cleared up. Jean had seen fresh carriage-marks on the snow outside, leading up to the door and round to the stables.

Evelyn saw nothing. Guided by Jean, she reached the great oaken arm-chair, and dropped into it; her lips white: her eyes closed.

"My dear Evelyn! Then you have come, and it is all right," cried Sybella, starting forward. "And he is found! I said so! I was sure it was nothing! I knew he must have taken shelter somewhere. Such an imprudent thing to go out in the snow! A man of his age! If people will be so foolish—! I shouldn't wonder if he had a bad cold afterwards—and rheumatism, of course. How wet you are, both of you! Really, it is quite madness! I can't think what Mr. Trevelyan was after to let you go! Such folly! If you had just stayed at home quietly! It is too imprudent! Look at the state of your skirts. Is she faint?"—to Jean. "Where is General Villiers? Is he coming? I drove over, in spite of the weather, when I heard—when Pearce brought me word—and the horses are put up here."

The first rush of Sybella's effervescence had always to be endured; it could no more be checked than the rush from a freshly uncorked champagne-bottle; but neither Stowe or Jean was idle. Wine and hot water stood ready on the hall-table, for Stowe had rightly conjectured that they would be needed: and while Jean pulled off Evelyn's wet gloves, and rubbed her icy fingers, Stowe brought a tumbler of steaming liquid.

"Drink it, ma'am—it will do you good," she entreated.

Evelyn was not fainting. She opened her eyes, whispered a low "Thanks," and made the effort; but after a few sips she sank back with the same look of powerlessness.

Sybella talked on, wondering, conjecturing, pitying, blaming.

Evelyn showed no consciousness of her presence.

Jean drew the housekeeper aside.

"We must get her upstairs," she whispered. "They are—coming—with him! They will be here directly. Send for Dr. Ingram, please—and oh! Do get her upstairs! Don't you understand? Oh, don't ask questions, only be quick—only get her upstairs!" implored Jean. "They are coming—with him! He was—found—there—on the marsh!"

Stowe understood now, and was stunned with the shock, unable to act. Before them all, she sat down, shaking visibly; the first time in her well-regulated life that she had ever taken such a liberty. She could only stare at Jean; and Jean knew there was no time to lose.

"Evelyn dear, you must come to your bedroom," she said, quitting Mrs. Stowe, and bending over the carved oak-chair.

"Come at once! Yes—now—come with me!"

The violet eyes opened slowly.

"Come, dear! Come, Evelyn! Please come!"

"Nonsense, Jean! What do you mean?" demanded Miss Devereux, nettled by what she counted to be interference. If Jean had proposed to keep Evelyn downstairs, she would have been the first to urge an opposite course. Nothing done by a Trevelyan could possibly be right in Sybella's eyes. "Much best for her to stay here a few minutes, till she gets warmer. Oh, you mean—to change her dress. But she is not fit to walk yet. When General Villiers arrives—"

"O hush!" entreated Jean.

"Really, Jean—"

"Miss Trevelyan says we are to send for Dr. Ingram," whispered the housekeeper's tremulous voice, close to Miss Devereux. The wording of the sentence was unfortunate.

"Send for Dr. Ingram! What for? Mrs. Villiers will be all right in a few minutes. She is just overdone—as anybody of any sense might expect her to be. Really, Jean, I think you a little over-rate your position here," declared Miss Devereux, in aggrieved accents. "Evelyn has been very kind to you, no doubt, giving you the run of the Park and all that, but you are hardly more than a child. I really don't quite see what you have to do with giving orders. Evelyn ought to take some more food before she moves. I never heard of anything so mad, as taking her to the marshes on such a night. If I had been here!—But some people have no common-sense. When General Villiers comes in, he will say —"

Evelyn stood up, her face rigid with anguish. "My own room—" she said distinctly. "Send for Dr. Ingram at once, Stowe—and wait here till—No, only Jean with me!" As Sybella drew near. "Only Jean!"

Sybella fell back.

Evelyn passed away with Jean, and Stowe vanished to obey the order.

"Well! I really do think—" gasped the astonished lady. "I really do! And I her aunt! And as for Jean Trevelyan! But she always was demented about those Trevelyanys! Such a stupid uninteresting girl! And Mr. Trevelyan as stiff as a poker—the most disagreeable man I ever saw! I am sure they are the last people I would ever go to in trouble. But then I am always so sensitive to manner—my feelings are so easily hurt—I really could not stand that sort of thing. It would make me quite ill! And the idea of sending for Dr. Ingram! Evelyn merely wants a good night's rest—and as for the General, I suppose he is just overdone, and can't get along fast. What else is to be expected, if people will be so crazy? And to send for Dr. Ingram, because Jean orders it! Ridiculous! I can't endure Dr. Ingram for my part."

Sybella had developed this dislike gradually: and no doubt, at the foundation of it, lay his relationship to the Trevelyanys.

Then, as Mrs. Stowe returned.

"What is all the fuss about, Stowe? And why is the General so long? I suppose he found shelter somewhere, but he ought to be here by this time. And Mr. Trevelyan—how he could allow Mrs. Villiers to take that walk, with only Miss Trevelyan—no proper protection?"

Sybella's flow of remarks was cut short. Mr. Trevelyan's voice was heard outside, speaking in subdued accents; and into the lighted hall was brought a silent presence, before which even Sybella's volubility failed.

For Evelyn was indeed a widow!

Not till midnight, when Dr. Ingram had departed, and when Evelyn was asleep under the influence of a semi-opiate, did Jean venture to leave her, and to steal downstairs. She believed that her father was there; but what might be the next step for either of them, Jean could not so much as conjecture. All she knew was that she herself could do and bear no more.

Mr. Trevelyan stood below, in the hall, as if at that moment expecting her. He had had a little warning from Dr. Ingram to "look after Jean!"

And he had also gone through a small passage-of-arms with Miss Devereux, wherein of course, since he was a gentleman, the lady had had the last word. Sybella felt it to be her duty—her positive duty—to circumvent the machinations of these pushing Trevelyans, and to protect her dear niece from falling hopelessly into their clutches.

She did not exactly say as much to Mr. Trevelyan, but she looked it every inch; and there was no mistaking what she meant, as she professed an eager desire not to be a burden on Mr. Trevelyan's time—he was always so busy—so much to do—and she, of course, a single lady, with so few ties—what more natural than that she should remain at the Park, and devote herself to her poor niece?

Yes, she would stay over the night, of course—oh, certainly—and as many nights as her dear niece might require her. Impossible to leave the young widow alone! Could Mr. Trevelyan think it of her? Oh, quite impossible! Would Mr. Trevelyan and Jean like to make use of her carriage to convey them home? It was so late, and of course they were fatigued. Grimshaw would think nothing—oh, nothing at all—of that little extra round on his way to the Brow. So easily managed! And really, the sooner the house was quiet for her beloved niece—though none of them could ever forget the trouble to which Mr. Trevelyan had put himself—still, at such a time, complete quiet was so very essential—

Mr. Trevelyan bowed assent. He did not wear an attractive expression at the moment. His bow was most gentlemanly, but a sardonic sneer lurked in the corners of his mouth, and his eyes scanned Miss Devereux, as they might have scanned some uncommon specimen of worm or beetle kind, from an ineffably superior intellectual height.

Sybella felt the contempt without understanding it, and she was irritated.

The passage-at-arms ended as she wished. The Trevelyans would go home that night, and would not even use her offered carriage—which in itself was a relief, since she stood greatly in awe of what the stable autocrat, Grimshaw, might say. But although she had her will, although she was to be left in undisturbed possession of the field, Sybella was not satisfied. She could never delude herself into thinking that she had the mastery of Mr. Trevelyan's iron will. He yielded: yet if he had chosen not to yield, she could not have made him.

When he stood waiting in the hall for Jean, he looked precisely as usual: upright, composed, grim. Not a hair was

disorganised: not a muscle was disturbed. A close observer might perhaps have noted a slight softening of expression, as he studied his daughter.

"Where's your hat, child?"

"Are we to walk home?" For the first time within Jean's recollection, the two miles to be traversed loomed before her imagination as a gigantic impossibility.

"No," in a suppressed voice. "Ingram undertook to send a fly, and it is here now. If Miss Devereux were not going to stay—" and a pause.

"She doesn't want us. But poor Evelyn!"

"Mrs. Villiers will send when she wants you. We can't force ourselves, even for her sake. Where's your ulster? To be sure—it went to be dried."

A touch of the bell brought Walters, carrying the ulster. "I did hope you'd both have stayed over the night, sir," he murmured, as he helped Jean to put it on.

"No—I think not. Miss Trevelyan has done enough. She will look round in the morning."

"Mrs. Villiers is asleep now," Jean said kindly to the man.

Mr. Trevelyan stopped to fasten some of Jean's buttons; then drew her hand within his arm. "Come, we must be off," he said. "Mind, Walters—anything we can do for Mrs. Villiers —"

"Yes, sir—I understand—thank you, sir."

The drive home was altogether silent. Jean could not trust herself to speak. She had eaten almost nothing since one o'clock, and the long strain was making itself felt.

"I sent word to your aunt that, if we came at all, we should be late—that she must not stay up, but might leave a good fire in the study," remarked Mr. Trevelyan, as they stopped at the Rectory. "And—tea. I thought you would rather have something here than at the Park. Walters would have got anything that I wished—but—jump out!"

Jean was past jumping. She descended somehow, and made her way to the study, where indeed a cheery fire blazed, and tea-things were outspread. Madame Collier's voice over the stairs kept Mr. Trevelyan back; and Jean could hear an exchange of low-voiced communications.

There was an exclamation or two in Madame Collier's voice, and then—

"On the marshes!—In the snow!—Too late!—All over!"—at intervals from her father.

Jean stood over the fire, feeling strangely. It had been such a terrible day. Only ten hours since she had quitted the Rectory, light-hearted and joyous—and all this to have come since! She felt as if ten weeks might have passed over her head. A vision rose before Jean of the General's tall figure and kind face, as he had come into his wife's boudoir; and then of the same, lying stark and cold in the white snow; and then of Evelyn's desolate misery; and a suffocating lump rose in her throat.

"Aunt Marie will see you presently, but I can't have talk to-night. You must go to bed as soon as you have had something to eat," said Mr. Trevelyan, entering.

He poked the fire carefully, arranged a bed of hot coals with deft fingers, and placed the kettle thereon.

"It will boil directly. Sandwiches—that's right. Sit down, Jean."

He pushed a chair towards her, and she obeyed, with a despairing sense of having come to the end of everything. Thus far she had kept up with marvellous courage for a girl of sixteen; but some measure of reaction was almost inevitable.

"Jean, my dear," said Mr. Trevelyan, looking at her. Then—

"Poor little girl!" came in a tone which she had never heard from him before.

He had been strongly stirred, and the underlying tenderness of the man for once pushed its way to the surface.

To Jean's utter amazement, she found herself sobbing, with her face on his shoulder, and one of his arms round her. Not only so, but as the paroxysm continued, he held her more tightly, and she heard him say—

"Never mind; don't be ashamed. You have done splendidly! —Like my own Jean!"

"O father!—If I could help it—"

"You can't just yet. Never mind. You won't be the worse for this."

Presently after a judicious pause—

"Now! Have you cried enough? I must make the tea."

Jean struggled manfully, and chained down the rising sobs; but she clung to him still, drawing long breaths of mingled pain and comfort. To her renewed amazement, his lips touched her brow with a light kiss.

"That's right. I am proud of my girl. Now sit up, and be brave. No, don't stand. I'll be tea-maker for once. You want something to eat."

"Oh, I can't!"

"You must. It will do nobody any particular good for you to starve yourself."

The essential common-sense of the remark was so like what she herself might have said to another, that Jean almost smiled. She was placed by Mr. Trevelyan in his deep arm-chair, made to lean back, and supplied with necessaries—nay, finding how she trembled, he even held the full cup to her lips. Though the first few mouthfuls threatened to choke her, a different state of things speedily followed. The inward shuddering grew less; and she was at length able to say with some degree of composure—

"Father, you don't think Evelyn will miss me when she wakes?"

"I don't know, my dear," he answered, too truthful to deny the possibility. "I only know that no choice was left to us. Miss Devereux has the rights of kinship; and we have only the rights of friendship. After all, the matter is in Mrs. Villiers' own hands. If she chooses, she can dismiss Miss Devereux and send for you."

"And if she does—"

"Then she shall have you."

Jean went to bed, more satisfied. Sleep seemed impossible, but she was young and healthy, and she had gone through severe exertion. Strange to say, the last impression on her mind, as she passed into dreamland, was not of the ghastly scene upon the marshes, but of her father's arm around her.

"O, I do love him!" she half unconsciously murmured.

CHAPTER X.

THE AFTER SMART.

"How doth Death speak of our beloved,
When it hath laid them low?

• • • • •

"It sweeps their faults with heavy hand,
As sweeps the sea the trampled sand,
Till scarce the faintest print is scanned.

• • • • •

"It takes each failing on our part,
And brands it in upon the heart,
With caustic power and cruel art."

Author of "The Schönberg-Cotta Family."

"IT's a scrumptious cake—very!" said Mrs. Kennedy, putting a piece into her own mouth.

She was in ante-lunch déshabillé, and looked, to say the least, not tidy. The inevitable end of loose hair obtruded itself from under a cap which had long passed its prime; and she only escaped having an unpinned collar by the simple process of wearing no collar at all.

Conflicting emotions showed themselves in her kind and genial face, for this was the day after General Villiers' funeral; and people have a natural feeling at such a time that the world ought not to run its usual course too blithely, that sunshine ought not to be too radiant, that cake ought not to taste too nice. Still, Mrs. Kennedy was not constitutionally given to depression, being a born optimist; a happy circumstance for one whose husband was a born pessimist, always disposed to hug his miseries, even when he had none.

Moreover the General and his wife had been her friends rather by circumstance than by choice; and Dicky, her spoilt youngest—not spoilt, of course, in maternal eyes—was irresistible.

"If father was to see you now! O Dicky, Dicky, Dicky! I'm sure the very next thing he'll have to do, will be to preach a sermon on greediness, all for yourself. Greediness!" repeated Mrs. Kennedy, with emphasis, counting herself a judicially severe mother.

It was to be feared that the said sermon would float as an outside fog over Dicky's brain, since Mr. Kennedy had not the art of reaching a child's mind. The road thereto is very straight, and Mr. Kennedy was wont to preach and expound in circles.

"Now you've had quite enough, Dicky—quite enough, and too much for any respectable little boy. No, not one single crumb more. I couldn't possibly, you know."

"I'm so awfully hungry, mother. Almost starved."

"Starved! After all that lot! And only two hours and a half since breakfast. Why, you're talking nonsense, don't you know? You'll got so fat, Dicky, you won't be able to walk, and we shall have to get a pulley to carry you. I don't know what boys are made of—I really don't! I know what they like to be made of, and that's plum-cake!"—in a sotto voce aside.

"I declare, here comes Mabel—Miss Ingram, I mean—" for the caller was not "Mabel" to small Dicky. "Well, well, just one more slice, and mind you don't say a single word to the others, or I shall have them all down upon me, plump; and there won't be a scrap left. Get along with you, Dicky, and be a good boy. Well, Mabel, my dear, how are you? Quite well? Sit down and tell me all about everything. Poor dear —"

"I can't really, Mrs. Kennedy—"

"Poor dear Thomas always forgets half that he hears, don't you know? Can't!—But you must! Now do tell me, how is that poor young thing? It's perfectly dreadful, isn't it? I couldn't get off to sleep last night for I don't know how long, thinking about her all alone in that huge house, and what in the world she's to do, you know. Have a piece of

cake, Mabel? No? It's very nice cake—made from a receipt of my mother's; something quite uncommon. Well, if you won't—! But that poor young widow, left all alone, and such a big property on her hands. Of course one always expected her to be a widow pretty early, in the nature of things. It couldn't help being so. If people will go and marry an old man, fit to be their grandfather—But then one doesn't expect it to be so awfully sudden: and not an atom of warning. Such a way to lose him too! Sit down, Mabel!"

"I can't really. I've come with a message to Mr. Kennedy: and I'm to wait for a verbal answer."

"Oh, well, Thomas is out now, but he'll be in this minute. You may as well sit down. Now do tell me how that poor thing is this morning. I suppose your father is attending her still. Oh, of course I know he never tells you anything particular, and if he did you wouldn't tell it again. I know how particular your father is, and quite right of him too. I hate gossip, my dear. But still he might just have happened to say if she was better."

"My father has not been to the Park yet."

"Oh, then, of course—! However, I heard she went to the funeral, and looked so lovely in her weeds, and was as composed as anything. Thomas was there, of course; but he hasn't had a word with Mrs. Villiers yet. You see, it's a little awkward—the Park being just within Dulveriford Parish—and then we all know she only came to St. John's to please her husband. I suppose Mr. Trevelyan has been to the Park a lot this week. Quite natural too. Oh, it will be all the Trevelyan's now, and nothing to do with St. John's. It was only the General kept her to that, don't you know—poor dear man! And of course, he wasn't musical. He knew the 'Old Hundredth' when he heard it, and he liked it played

at a sort of 'Dead March in Saul' time, with all the little turns and twists of seventy years ago. Thomas sometimes begged the organist to put on a few of those twiddles, just by way of pleasing the poor dear General, and he did try, but he couldn't get them stately enough. The General always shook his head afterward, and said, 'Ah, it wasn't what it used to be.' Well, and I suppose Jean has been with Mrs. Villiers all the week too."

Mabel hesitated. "I don't think so—quite—from what I hear," she said. "My father says nothing, or Jean either. Jean is always so shut-up, you know—so unlike most girls. But I believe Mrs. Villiers only wants to be alone, and seems to turn from all sympathy—even Jean's. It seems odd; when Jean and Mr. Trevelyan have done so much for her."

"She is stupefied, poor thing, and doesn't know what to do or say next. I'm told she was quite decided about not asking either Mr. Trevelyan or my husband to take the funeral, but she would have that old gentleman down from London. He was rather slow, don't you think? I hope Mrs. Villiers is grateful, after the way the Trevelyans have behaved; but of course she must be stunned for a little while. Jean's an odd girl, very odd, so shut-up, as you say," pursued Mrs. Kennedy, in reflective accents. "I never can half make her out, she's so odd. But plucky, don't you know?"

"It must have been dreadful for poor Jean, to find the General like that, when she was alone."

"Like that—yes, dreadful," echoed Mrs. Kennedy. "I'm sure one feels any amount for the poor widow. That's what it is, Mabel, you see. It isn't so much for us—" as if striving to disentangle the strands of her own sensations. "They are a sort of friends—were, I mean—at least, I mean, he was and

she is—at least, if she doesn't change—and my husband always thought there never was such a man as the dear General. But Mrs. Villiers doesn't care a rap for me, don't you know?—And to be sure, why should she? Everybody isn't made to suit everybody else; and it would be uncommonly stupid if they were. Like rows of buttons and buttonholes, you know. Well, and then there's the will. Of course you know all about the will. I call it a shame, only one can't say a word of blame about the good old man, now he's gone; and of course he meant it for the best, in some way or other—only one can't imagine what way, and I do call it a shame. I can't think what in the world possessed him to go and do it. As if a lovely young thing like her was never to marry again? But she'll have to wait for a rich husband, that's all. She isn't fit to rough it, you know."

"Is not this very soon to be talking about another husband?" asked Mabel, rather jarred.

"Well, yes; and I wouldn't to anybody except you. But how is one to help thinking? So Mr. James Trevelyan couldn't run down for the funeral. What a pity! He's a busy man, of course, and lots of engagements always, but I should think he might have managed it, if he had chosen. Now, he's a nice man—" meditatively—"and so handsome; and just a nice age—and I should have thought—But of course he has no money, so it's no good fancying anything about him. There's Thomas at last! Catch him, Mabel, before he gets into the study."

Mabel was met by Mr. Kennedy entering the room in which they had held their tête-à-tête.

"Thomas, Mabel has a message from her father," quoth his wife.

"Or rather from Mrs. Villiers through my father. Mrs. Villiers would be glad to see you, if you would call on her, either this afternoon or to-morrow."

"Now, Mabel! And you never told me that, all the time you have been here!"

Mabel laughed. She might have pleaded lack of opportunity. Mr. Kennedy stood gazing at her with blank eyes, while her words worked their way through the cotton-wool which enveloped his brain.

"Mrs. Villiers—" he echoed. "Yes—Mrs. Villiers, you say. Yes, certainly. I will go to-morrow."

"Very well. I will tell my father," Mabel said, and took herself off with all speed.

"Now that was an odd way to ask you! Why couldn't she send a post-card?" demanded Mrs. Kennedy. "People are so queer, and I do think people in trouble are the queerest of all. One never knows how they'll take it, or what they will be after next. What do you suppose Mrs. Villiers wants you for, Thomas?"

Mr. Kennedy had no suggestions to offer. He was not, like his wife, original.

Evelyn Villiers, far from being stupefied by her loss, as Mrs. Kennedy conjectured, was rather awakened by it to an abnormal acuteness of sensation. She was of stronger fibre, of more tough and elastic make, than would commonly have been supposed by those who only saw, with unpenetrating eyes, her fair and fragile exterior.

On the night of her husband's death, she had been worn out with bodily exertion and mental agony; but life was strong within her still, and she knew it before another day had passed. She might and did look ineffably mournful and sweet; she might and did think that the best of her days were over; she might and did feel that things could never again be to her as they had been; nevertheless, life stirred actively as an under-current, bearing her on with resistless power to "new tasks and sorrow's new," not to speak of possible new joys also.

In health, she suffered loss than might have been expected. The strain and the shock had actually told less upon her than upon Jean; doubtless because she had given in more at the time, and had leant upon others, at least in a measure, while Jean had borne up, and had endured a full pressure of responsibility. But nobody thought of pitying Jean, except in a perfunctory fashion; and nobody noticed anything unusual in her, unless it were Mr. Trevelyan; while all the world was convinced that Evelyn must be utterly broken-down. She was obliged to consent to one or two more visits from Dr. Ingram, if only as an escape from Miss Devereux' importunity: but frail as she looked, she was not ill.

"I wish I were! Anything to stop thinking," she said mournfully to him. "But I am well—I don't need medicines."

And Dr. Ingram frankly endorsed her words.

To get rid of Sybella before the funeral proved impossible, without stronger measures than Evelyn in her grieved and softened state cared to take. She submitted, therefore; and as the only means of avoiding Miss Devereux's interminable chit-chat, she spent her days in solitude, refusing

admittance to all—even to Jean. For if she saw more of Jean, she would have inevitably to see more of Sybella.

Jean understood, at least in a measure, and trusted Evelyn entirely: yet there was a sense of pain.

The workings of Evelyn's mind, during those hushed hours of solitude, between the day of her husband's death and that of the funeral, were multiform. She was ever reviewing her past life, living again through the years in imagination. Her girlish haste to escape from the bondage of a home with Miss Devereux, had flung her into another bondage, hardly less irksome to her restless nature: and for over seven years she had endured the consequences. But this was not the light in which Evelyn, newly widowed, looked upon her past.

She knew indeed how things had been; yet in the rebound, so often seen with respect to those who have passed away, especially where the love has been defective, she could now allow no fault in her husband. All blame for past difficulties was to be attached to herself; none to him. A remorseful passionate back-wave of love held her in its grasp. She had not so loved him while he was with her: but the loneliness of her young widowhood, the sense of having no one to appeal to, caused a magnified sense of his protection and sympathy, of his unvarying kindness, of his unfailing interest in all that had concerned her.

Evelyn forgot now, or thought of as utterly unimportant, the daily frictions, the differences of opinion, which had so worried her. The absolutism of his judgment, the narrowness of his views, became as nothing, seen beside her thousand recollections of his true nobility and goodness, of his pure and upright life. And his love for her! She knew at last what that had been. What though they had differed

theologically on many points? What though he had seemed at times theoretically, though not practically, hard towards those who differed from him? He had been true, constant, honourable, blameless: and how he had loved her! The world grew into a desert, without that unfailing love. Evelyn had not measured its worth until she had lost it.

She grieved for him sorely; not with the peaceful sorrow of a wife who has been perfectly at one with her husband; but with the bitter distress of one who has failed to appreciate till too late. All her little coldnesses, all her little takings of offence, all her little stiffnesses of demeanour, rose up in overwhelming array, enlarged by the microscope of imagination into gigantic proportions. In him she could see nothing now but goodness and beauty. All failings were struck away by the hand of death. She went over and over the different manifestations of his rectitude, his kindness, his chivalrous gentleness, his loving guardianship of her, his manly readiness to forgive, till he grew into an idol set up on a shrine in her heart, as a being to be reverenced and almost worshipped.

Womanly—all this!

The very will, which others were quick to blame, leaving the whole estate to her, but only so long as she should remain unmarried, supplied fresh fuel to the flame of her ardent devotion. Friends might wonder; Evelyn would allow no word of blame.

"He was right—perfectly right," she said. "The property must of course remain in the Villiers family. He only had to provide for my widowhood—and that means for my lifetime. I shall never marry again. He understood me, and he knew that I should understand him."

One thought of happiness dawned upon her as the hours of those long days dragged by—a thought of happiness, because it meant action completely in the face of her own desires, action which she could therefore feel to be a kind of sacrifice of herself to her husband's memory. She would in all things now be guided solely by his wishes and opinions. She would think what he had thought, she would do what he had done, she would cultivate the friends that he had preferred, she would follow out the lines that he would have chosen for her; and so, at least in a measure, she would make up to him for her non-submission in the past. St. John's should be exclusively her Church; the good people of St. John's congregation should be her especial clique. No matter if they did not suit her taste. Enough of that. They had suited her husband's taste. Since she had not been one with him while he was present, she would be one with him now he was gone.

So wrapped up was Evelyn in these thoughts, that she failed to see the opposite side of the question, failed to remember what was due in other quarters to tried friends of her own. Her whole heart flowed out in imaginative adulation of the man she had lost; and for a time all else went down before this phase of affairs.

There was at once, almost unconsciously on Evelyn's part, a slight drawing back from the Trevelyan family; too slight to be noted by outsiders, too decided not to be noted by themselves. She was the same in manner when they met, but she did not press for frequent visits from Mr. Trevelyan or Jean. They did not speak of it, one to another, but both alike ceased to go often to the Park, waiting for renewed invitations to do so; which invitations did not come. Evelyn had sent for Mr. Kennedy after the funeral; and thenceforward, she was perceived no more within the walls

of Dulveriford Church. Had not her husband always wished her to attend only St. John's?

The St. John's people were greatly touched to see the fair young widow, with her sad face and voluminous crape, seated in the chancel, having the General's empty chair beside her. Mr. Kennedy took care to supply no end of mournful hymns and sorrowful sermons, as particularly suited to a widow's frame of mind, forgetting, good man, in his sympathy with her, that the entire congregation did not consist of widows. When she came gliding out of Church at the end of the Service, half the elderly ladies present, widows or no, would have liked to press forward and sympathetically squeeze the hand of Mrs. Villiers of Dutton Park. But Evelyn had the art of keeping people at a distance; and few actually ventured. Those who tried it once were so distinctly bowed aside that they did not try it a second time; yet poor Evelyn took herself to task afterwards; for were they not his friends?

It might have been expected that Cyril would come home earlier than usual, on account of his sister's trouble; and indeed he was actually sent for to the funeral. Only two days before, however, mild scarlatina broke out in the school, and Cyril was among the first victims to the attack. Sybella, in dire alarm, announced that she could neither have him at the Brow, nor meet him anywhere else these holidays—self being as usual her first thought. It was quite impossible that she should be exposed to infection! Somebody else might undertake Cyril—or Cyril could remain at school!

"Then as soon as it is counted right for him to travel, I shall have him to stay with me at the seaside," Evelyn said, hardly caring to veil her contempt for the other's puny self-regard.

"Jean, what do you think of this?" asked her father, three or four days after Christmas.

He was alone with her in the morning-room.

"This" meant a letter from Oswald, which he handed to Jean, and she read it slowly, concealing what she felt. The one delight in prospect had been Oswald's New Year visit, and now he wished not to come. He had an invitation from a friend in Town, and the house was one where there would be "lots of fun." It would be "awfully nice;" and he knew they would not mind his going "just this time." The very next leave he could get, he would be sure to come home.

"Well, Jean?"

"He wants it very much. May he, father?"

"You will not be too direfully disappointed?"

"O no!" And Jean smiled, for she could be a very Spartan for Oswald's sake. The reality of her love for him made it impossible that she should put the thought of her own pleasure before the thought of his. "He will get leave again soon."

"I don't see any especial reason for saying 'no.' Young fellows naturally like variety." After a break, and in a different voice, he said, "You saw Mrs. Villiers yesterday afternoon?"

"Yes." Jean lifted pained eyes to her father. "I don't quite understand Evelyn," she said slowly. "Please don't say anything to anybody."

"No. You find her changed."

"Not exactly. She is, and yet she isn't. Not changed really in herself. She was as dear and kind to me as ever."

Jean paused, and appeared to swallow something down with difficulty.

"But she seems to have set herself to be like her husband—like him in everything. She told me so, and she asked me to tell you. It is because she thinks she ought. She will always go to St. John's now—evening as well as morning—and she will try hard to like Mr. Kennedy's sermons, and to care for General Villiers' friends—even that dreadful Colonel Atherstone. She had a pile of little tracts on her table, that General Villiers used to be fond of, and I suppose she had been reading them. I don't know why she shouldn't. Only, it is all because she is sure it would please him, you know. I don't like to say it, but I couldn't help fancying it was just a little as if she were acting a part in a drama. Only she doesn't feel that."

"No; she is genuine always, to the best of her self-knowledge."

"Yes—I am sure she is. And, father, if she should see less of us now than she used, we are to know—to understand—that it is because of him—because she thinks—" Jean hesitated again, "because she thinks she has been wrong. She cried so, and I told her I could not see it—but—of course if she feels it right—"

"Of course! I have foreseen this."

"I don't quite understand—" Jean came to another break, and Mr. Trevelyan knew that she was sorely tried. "I can't

see—Being dead doesn't make a man right in every single thing he ever did and said!"

"Not precisely!" with a grim smile at the mode of expression. "It only lends more charity to our judgments."

"But if I were Evelyn, I don't think I could make myself feel and believe what I didn't really feel and believe, only because I wanted to agree with him."

"You could not!"

"If she didn't agree with him before, I don't see how she can now."

"She can make a Pope of his memory, and submit her own judgment to his. I doubt if she goes so far in reality. It is more emotional than logical."

Jean stood, pale and troubled, gazing into the fire, unaware how closely she was herself being studied.

"If Mrs. Villiers were over fifty, she might keep on in the same line for the rest of her life; get into her husband's groove, and remain there persistently, out of respect to him. A good many women are capable of such devotion. But only twenty-five!—No, she is too young. Have patience, Jean. She will rally to her true self by-and-by, and you will not lose your friend."

Jean's eyes were suffused suddenly.

"There is something a little morbid in all this. She will come out of it—modified, perhaps, but not a mere copy of her husband. No need to worry yourself. She will fight through it, and you too."

He opened another letter, read, re-read, and looked at Jean.

"The very thing! I have been wishing I could get you away. Here's an invitation in the nick of time."

"For me!" Jean did not know what it was to leave home alone.

"To Wufflestone. Jem's mother."

"Cousin Chrissie Trevelyan! But that is such a long way off, father. And I don't see how I can be spared."

"We'll manage the sparing. I think a change is desirable. You have not been quite the thing lately."

Jean looked up gratefully. That anybody should have detected the languor which she had resolutely concealed was astonishing.

"Oh, I'm all right," she said—an involuntary utterance.

"You will not be the worse for a break. She speaks of the middle of February—sorry her spare room is engaged till then. I shall like you to know Chrissie Trevelyan. She's a kind creature. You will be in good hands."

"I only just remember her."

"So much the better. New acquaintances are refreshing sometimes. I'm afraid you will not think Wufflestone beautiful; too flat, after this. Mind, if they wish it, you can stay a month or more."

"If she wishes it?" with a slight stress on the pronoun.

"Yes. She expects her nephew, Giles Cuthbert, for part of the winter; and Jem may be there too. You will like to see

Jem again. Cuthbert?—I believe he is a nice fellow on the whole—idle and well-meaning, and good to his aunt."

"I can't bear idle people."

Mr. Trevelyan laughed. "Every hive has its drones. You will never be one of them. By-the-by, you had better have a new dress, Jean—and a hat."

"O thank you!"

New dresses and hats were rare things in Jean's existence.

CHAPTER XI.

NEW GROUND.

"And is it true
Fire rankles at the heart of every globe?
Perhaps. But these are matters one may prove
Too deeply for poetic purposes:
Rather select a theory that . . . yes,
Laugh! What does that prove?—Stations you midway
And saves some little o'er refining."

"Sordello": R.
BROWNING.

"IT is five o'clock, I do believe," said Mrs. Trevelyan.

She slowly lifted her eyes from the book which had held her enthralled during an hour past; eyes exactly like those of her son Jem in shape and colouring, but at this moment ineffably dreamy. It was not Mrs. Trevelyan's wont to indulge in absent attitudes for the purpose of impressing other people, after the fashion of Sybella Devereux: but she was of a genuinely dreamy nature, given to losing herself in vague trains of ideas, to the complete exclusion of her surroundings. This tendency does not always imply profound thought; in fact, it very often does not mean "thought" at all, in the strict sense of the word. It only means a certain readiness—possibly a weak readiness—to be swept away by any little streamlet of notions or emotions, no matter how trivial. The veriest child-story in pink or blue cover had power to withdraw all Mrs. Trevelyan's faculties from the outer world; and if she began to consider the make of her next bonnet she was plunged into an abyss of cogitation.

But on the other hand, she was not a vapid woman; she read a good deal besides stories; and she was capable to some extent of following out a chain of mental observations.

"Five o'clock, I do believe," she repeated, as the hall clock boomed out the hour.

Her eyes travelled to the hearth-rug, and were there arrested by a fine black Cocker spaniel of solid make, lying, nose on paws, in a position of comfort.

"Prince! Only think! The little girl will be here directly."

Prince was a gentleman, born and bred. He replied at once to the remark, left his cosy corner, and came to his mistress' side.

Though past fifty, she was still slight in figure, and active when not dreaming. She wore perpetual black, and it suited well the pale brown hair, arranged in smooth bands on either side of her forehead. A modified widow's cap had been her headgear for many years, and nobody would have liked anything else. Her movements were very gentle, ladylike, and quiet.

The room was small, too full of furniture, and overcrowded with knick-knacks. A continuous sheet of portraits in every variety of frame clothed the walls, and all gaps were filled up with brackets or hanging plates of old china. One window overlooked the village street, with a neat front garden and a goodly bank of evergreens between; the other window, a bow, opened upon a sloping lawn. Both house and garden were upon a small scale, but both also were prettily designed.

"Only a few minutes more, Prince. We shall like to have her, shall we not? And you will be a dear good dog, and not bark or frighten the little girl. Children don't like to be frightened, you know. So you must be very gentle to Jean."

If brown eyes could speak, the intelligent orbs of Prince uttered volumes, as they gazed into the lady's face.

"Good Prince! You understand it all, don't you?—Every word! I used to like little Jean very much. She was a dear little girl—rather funny, but nice. She must be grown now. Why, it is actually a quarter past five. And no tea up! Giles! —You there!"

"My dear aunt, don't excite yourself, pray! The clock is fast, and the train will be slow. Usual combination of circumstances."

"But the tea! Maria seems to have forgotten. What can she be about? O no, don't ring—please don't ring! You see—" in a hushed voice—"Maria has rather a temper, and I don't think she or the cook quite like it. And if the cook is cross to-morrow morning, it is uncomfortable. O the tea is sure to come directly—only I can't think what Maria is about. Don't ring, please, Giles. Yes, I always keep that clock rather fast —just to hurry on Maria."

"Doesn't Maria know that it is fast?"

"Well, yes; and somehow she always remembers it, and I never do. How long have you been in the room? I didn't hear you come."

"No, indeed. You were utterly lost to all sublunary considerations—mentally and spiritually gone. It was a mere casket sitting on that chair—the outside shell—interior vanished elsewhere! What have you of such engrossing interest? History—philosophy—science? Whew—it's a story—a good little innocent story of sweet little boys and girls."

"Ah, that is the worst of me. I do get so interested in a story. Would you believe it? I had forgotten that you were in the house. And when I looked up and saw you, I was as startled!"

"No, I don't think I can believe that!"—solemnly shaking his head. "Too good an opinion of myself!"

"Ah, now you are quizzing me. But really that little girl ought to arrive. I hope the train hasn't broken-down."

"It's such a common thing for trains to break down! Just as likely as not!"

"Now, Giles! I do wish though, that I had gone to the station to meet her. If it had not been for the rain—"

"Why didn't you ask me to go?"

"You!!"

Giles Cuthbert laughed. He was a rather largely-built man, with long loose limbs, and a sunburnt face, not good-looking as to feature, yet attractive from its humorous geniality. His movements were deliberate and gentlemanly; and he had a curious voice, soft, low, somewhat drawling, but without affectation. The man altogether was entirely natural. In age he might have been almost anywhere between thirty and forty-five.

"How old is this little girl?"

"Jean! I don't exactly know. I have been trying to remember; but the years do go so fast—and one doesn't exactly like to inquire, because it seems as if one had not cared. I could ask Jem, to be sure, but I always forget. She must be—thirteen—fourteen—nearly fourteen! It is years since I have seen any of those Trevelyanys. Jean's mother was a sweet woman but her father—No, I never did care for Stewart."

"Hasn't she been here before?"

"I'm afraid I have never asked her. Things have come about so, you know. One can't always be seeing all one's relations, and Dulveriford is out of the way—so far north. I shouldn't have thought of asking the child now, only Jem put the idea into my head; he said she wanted a change, he

thought. She had had a fright or something, and somebody wrote word to Jem that she was not looking well. O I remember—there was a poor old gentleman found frozen to death at night on the marshes; and Jean happened to be there."

"Odd place for a child to happen to be in."

"Yes: I don't know how it was. Jem didn't say much, and I have forgotten what he did say. He will tell us more when he comes. It will not do to tease her with questions."

"And Jem is coming home himself when she is here?"

"Yes; so nice, isn't it? I don't know when he can manage it; but as soon as possible. Jean has always been rather a favourite of his. Dear Jem is so fond of children."

"Here comes the infant, aunt!"

"Now, my dear Giles, she isn't an infant I assure you. Why, girls of thirteen and fourteen are nearly grown-up in these days. They know so much more than I do, that I am half afraid of them. All about atoms and cheese-mites, and laws of nature, and gases, and how things grow—it quite frightens one. Yes, there's the cab. I ordered the cab to be at the station, and I sent word to the station-master to see after Jean. I did want to send Maria, but cook doesn't like Maria to go out when it rains. You see cook is rather rheumatic. No tea yet! What can Maria be after? I almost think I shall have to ring? O no, wait, please—she will come to answer the front bell, and then I can speak."

"I don't see the precise connection between cook's rheumatism and Maria's staying indoors. You seem to have a pair of dragonesses in the kitchen."

"No, indeed—pray don't say such things, Giles! Somebody might hear! It is only that I do like to keep people good-tempered. Cook is such a nice worthy creature—I am sure, if I were dying, she would do anything for me! But she does get rather old, and if anything puts her out, the dinner is spoilt."

"I should be disposed to prefer a cook who would do anything for me while I was alive and well. What's that for?"

Mrs. Trevelyan had produced a neat square of white knitting.

"Why—nothing, dear; only a very nice clergyman said last year in a sermon that women ought to make a point of doing needlework—at least, I think he meant that! So I have always kept this at hand since, for emergencies. I am afraid I don't do much—" regretfully—"but it is nicer to be found busy. Jean might think she had such an idle cousin."

"Ah! A hint for me!" Giles luggered out a big volume of natural history, seated himself, and opened at random. "Wouldn't it be more effective to be found reading aloud?—Surprised in the act of improving our minds?"

In a monotonous sing-song, Giles started off—"The Chlamyphores, which have ten teeth on each side of both jaws, five toes on each foot, the anterior claws very large, crooked, compressed, and furnishing, as in the Cabassous, a very powerful cutting instrument adapted for digging. The back is covered—' Hallo!"

Mrs. Trevelyan never could resist Giles' manner, and she was in a paroxysm of laughter when the door opened to admit, not the expected "little girl," but a tall damsel, with pale oval face, and combination of shyness and reserve crystallised into a resolute stillness.

Giles did not start up quickly, yet he was standing, before Jean could actually enter; and his twinkling eyes took her in at a glance, twinkling more than usual at his aunt's mistake. The subdued "Hallo!" meant some measure of surprise on his own part. "So—ho!" thought he. "That is what Jem is after! Little girl, indeed!"

Mrs. Trevelyan's greeting was no less warm than if the supposititious "infant" had really appeared. She took Jean into her arms with repeated kisses, while Jean, unused to be hugged by one virtual stranger before another and absolute stranger, was conscious of an inward glow of response, but outwardly shrank rather more into herself.

Giles Cuthbert came forward, as a member of the household, to offer his meed of welcome, and thereby recalled Mrs. Trevelyan to her duty.

"How stupid of me! I'm forgetting to introduce—my nephew, Mr. Cuthbert, Jean—Miss Trevelyan, Giles. Of course you have heard of Giles, dear, hundreds of times. He belongs to us, you know, in a way. Now do sit down by the fire, and warm yourself. You must be cold after travelling all day. Dulveriford always seems so far north—almost out of the world."

Jean was amused, for Dulveriford seemed to her the world's centre.

"Come and sit down! The tea—O, that girl is gone."

"Too late, aunt!" Giles' hand was on the bell, unbidden, and a sharp tinkle sounded.

"Now, Giles!" reproachfully. "And there really was not the least need. I can hear her coming now along the passage. After all, she was only waiting till Jean arrived—keeping the

tea nice and hot. My dear!—" to Jean. "I am astonished to see such a grown-up young lady. Jem never gave me that impression. Is it possible that you are only thirteen?"

"Sixteen last birthday!"

"Ah, that makes all the difference. I shall tell Jem, he really must leave off speaking of you as a 'little girl,' because it gives such a wrong impression. Why, I have actually been telling Prince not to bark, or frighten you. Yes: this is Prince —such a dear clever dog. I assure you, he understands every single thing that is said to him."

"One has to avoid talking secrets before Prince. He is apt to repeat them, on the sly."

"Now, Giles! What will Jean think of you? But really, the dear dog is wonderfully clever. He reasons like any human being. It is all nonsense to say that dogs can't reason, because I know Prince does. Now I am wondering whom Jean is supposed to be like. You are such a curious mixture, my dear. A little of your father, certainly, and a little of your mother! She was such a sweet woman! Ah, you have your grandmother Trevelyan's chin! And your grandmother Ingram's mouth! Only the way you shut your lips is like a Trevelyan. Your eyes are nobody's—"

"Unless Miss Trevelyan's own," murmured Giles.

"I mean, nobody that I have seen. Of course, one could trace them back, if one had lived long enough. Everything comes from somewhere," said Mrs. Trevelyan, with gentle positiveness and profundity. "But the way you use your eyes, dear, is quite like an Ingram—like one branch of the Ingram family, I mean. And you have the long Trevelyan hand—"

"Don't be astonished," Giles put in softly. "My aunt always appraises her guests in this fashion. Eyes, nose, mouth, worth so much apiece; total, so much: samples of doctrine of heredity."

"Now, Giles! But Jean understands, don't you, dear? Of course I like to know how much of you belongs to your own family. As for heredity—" the speaker folded dreamy hands, preparing for a gentle canter on her pet hobby-horse—"I do not see how anybody who knows anything of life can doubt it. Why, look at handwriting alone! Jean makes the tails of her g's and z's exactly like her old great-uncle Thomas—I mean, like his writing—and yet she never even saw him, and learnt from quite a different person. So you know that must have come down by inheritance."

"To be sure, there is Mrs. Wiggins—she is our great lady here, Jean, the wife of our squire—Mrs. Wiggins thinks a mother can do anything in the world with her children, can turn them out whatever shape she chooses. But that is a great deal more easily said than done: and Mrs. Wiggins only has one little girl. I always notice that it is the mothers with only one child who think that they can do exactly whatever they like with their children. If she had a dozen, she would have found by this time, that all the training in the world wouldn't make them all grow up alike. I have only had one as it happens, but I never could model Jem. He took his own shape, all I could do, dear fellow! And I am sure I don't want him to be different, for he is all one could wish. But still, you see what I mean. And I was one of thirteen, so I do know something about it. Not two of us turned out the same; and yet I'm sure there was not a grain of difference made in the way we were treated."

Giles rose, and laid hands on the teapot.

"My dear Giles! What am I thinking about? Now that is the worst of me. If I begin to talk, I forget everything. And poor Jean half starved! No? But I am sure you must be. Have you had a proper lunch? Only sandwiches! Could you not eat an egg? Well, at all events you must take plenty of bread-and-butter."

Giles relinquished the teapot, handed eatables, and found his way to a seat nearer Jean, where he could study her at leisure—for Jem's sake. He was at pains to draw her out, endeavouring to bring about a relaxation of her too serious face. Weather and journey were discussed for a while with no particular result, and Prince was called up to be caressed by Jean.

"Fond of reading," Giles asked presently, noting a glance towards the bookcase. "You won't find dissertations here on cheese-mites or atoms. That is the correct thing for a young lady, I am told."

Jean's grave lips unbent.

"Wufflestone lags behind the age. But if you want to begin studies in Phrenology, and all that sort of thing, you have come to the right place. My aunt has a perfect library of such literature."

"I should like to know more about Phrenology."

"The science of bumps! I am not sure that I shall not recommend Lavater. Rather big volumes, but you can soon skim them. Plenty about features—noses, chins, and so on. You've no conception what an amount of character exists in your neighbours' noses."

"Not really?" said Jean.

"Not a doubt of it. There's the sensible nose, and the stupid nose; the cogitative nose and the unintellectual nose; the ill-tempered nose and the sweet-tempered nose; the strong nose and the weak nose."

"Is the weak nose always short?"

"By no means. You may have a strong short nose, or a weak long one."

"Suppose I had a weak nose and a firm chin?" questioned Jean.

"Inherited from opposite sides? No doubt you would be weak in one direction, strong in another. It would mean a perpetual contest between nose and chin—sometimes the one victorious, sometimes the other."

Jean could not make out from his face whether he did or did not mean what he said. He was politely serious, only his eyes never ceased to twinkle.

"But that is too funny," she said, laughing.

"Immense amount of truth in it. Of course you must take old Lavater cum grano salis. I shall have to conduct you through something more modern while you are here. He and the older phrenologists could only assign a particular characteristic to a particular bump, and leave it there to tyrannise over the individual. Modern wisdom begins to suspect that the mind secretes the body, so to speak, like a mollusc secreting its shell. According to which notion, a man's character is not weak because his chin retreats, but his chin retreats because his character is weak."

"Do you really believe that?"

Giles made a comical movement of his shoulder. "Why not? How can one tell? Seems odd, when you come to think of it—but everything is odd when you come to think of it. One can't tell why a weak nature should secrete a retreating chin, for instance; but one cannot get out of the puzzle, because there is not the least doubt that retreating chins and feeble characters do very often go together."

Jean drew a long breath of interest, and her eyes lighted up with the fascination of a new idea. "How nice!" thought Mrs. Trevelyan. "Dear Giles is quite lively—taking real trouble with Jean. He must like her. She is not at all a bad-looking girl—such regular features, and such a nice figure; and she holds herself well, and is so very ladylike. I can't bear fidgety people, and Jean doesn't fidget in the least. It will save a great deal of trouble if Giles should take a fancy to her. I can send them out to walk together, and get him to show her the country round. Yes, she certainly is good-looking, almost handsome, when her eyes grow so bright; and she has a soft pleasant laugh. I am glad she has come. I think I shall grow fond of Jean."

CHAPTER XII.

THE WIGGINSES AND MAIDENHAIR.

"The happy find
Equality of beauty everywhere
To feed on."

JEAN INGELOW.

MRS. TREVELYAN carried out her intention, and made abundant use of Giles Cuthbert for the amusing of Jean. Usually he was not amenable to such efforts, having a great objection to needless trouble, but for once, he offered no objection. If he had taken a fancy to the girl, that made all the difference. The laziest people living will take trouble to please themselves.

Giles liked ease; and his life had been such as to foster this inclination. He had been born, not to wealth, but to sufficient means; and he had been brought up from childhood with the notion, that while it was correct and gentlemanly to have some stated occupation, there was no necessity for him to work hard. So he never had worked hard. He had passed schooldays with tolerable credit; he had gone through college with no particular reproach; and he had consented to the law as a profession. There advance was stayed. Some amount of preparatory reading was accomplished; and Giles, finding law by no means to his taste, threw it up. Months of dallying followed, and he began to talk of a career in politics; but an opening had to be waited for, and somebody suggested a lengthy tour on the Continent, by way of preparation. Giles seized on this notion, his indulgent father always consenting; and the tour proved to be a very lengthy one indeed.

At twenty-five, his future mode of life was still uncertain, when the sudden death of that father left him in easy

circumstances, unfettered, depending on nobody, while nobody depended on him.

Thenceforward, he drifted away from any definite line of life, simply pleasing his own fancies. He had no lands or tenants to occupy him; nothing beyond a clear fifteen hundred a year, to spend as he would. Since Giles had expensive tastes, he found no difficulty in getting rid of that amount yearly; indeed, at times, he outran it, though not seriously, for debt was a matter which disturbed his peace of mind, and Giles preferred to be comfortable, mentally as well as bodily.

He lived a good deal in Town, travelled a good deal on the Continent, saw a good deal of society, skimmed a good deal of literature, and in a lazy fashion, found a good deal to do. When money ran short, he would betake himself to Mrs. Trevelyan's Cottage for a few weeks, and would "vegetate" there in contented idleness. Mrs. Trevelyan had always been his favourite aunt, and her home was always open to him.

There were capabilities in Giles, which, rightly trained and used, might have resulted in a fine character; but it is through resistance, not compliance, through hardship, not ease, that harmony and beauty of character are evolved. For the bare idea of grandeur, opposition overcome is a necessity.

A boat swept downward by the current may be pretty: but there is nothing "fine" about it. Our higher admiration is reserved for the same boat manfully fighting its way upstream, overcoming difficulty inch by inch through resolute effort. A tree, reared in a hothouse, with soil, warmth, food, amply provided, may be a most successful specimen of its kind; but it suggests no thought of victory; it is only the pampered darling of scientific care. ' The gnarled and

twisted oak, which has fought its way through countless storms, has mastered unnumbered hardships, stands out as a type of the truly great, of the morally grand.

' I must acknowledge here a debt to Mr. Ruskin.

Giles Cuthbert had fought through few difficulties, had mastered few oppositions. His had been a smooth and leisurely existence; hard duties had not come to him as a necessity; and he had not turned aside to seek them for the sake of others. The consequent growth of character was easy, self-satisfying, pleasant in many respects, but by no means great.

Jean had been surrounded from babyhood by a far more embracing environment, had been compelled habitually to march in the face of her own inclinations, had had to wrestle through countless oppositions. Instead of finding all difficulties cleared away from her path, she had been trained to meet and grapple with them. The resisting vigour of her growth was gradually shaping a woman's character of fine outlines, pure, straightforward, self-denying—such a growth as could never have resulted from a spoilt and cosseted existence.

Perhaps the very contrast between the two drew them together. Jean liked Cuthbert despite his laziness, which was, after all, more mental than bodily. He was ready enough for physical exertion, if an adequate object lay ahead. It was steady work from which he turned with loathing; work which had to be done, whatever his passing mood might be. He was quaint, amusing, and full of fun. Jean had never before laughed to such an extent; indeed, when once it becomes an admitted fact that somebody is

funny, very little wit is needed to set people's risible muscles in motion.

She liked Mr. Cuthbert, certainly. Not as she liked Jem; not as she liked Cyril; not with liking to be named beside her love for Oswald; still, she found him a pleasant companion. Of course he was ages older than herself; why, he actually had a grey hair or two visible. Jean set him down loosely in her girlish mind as "somewhere about forty or fifty," which to a girl not yet seventeen, sounds venerable. On the whole, she was inclined to regard him as a species of adopted uncle, much nearer to her father than to herself in standing.

Mrs. Trevelyan, knowing Giles to lack about fifteen years of the fifty, did not view matters in precisely the same light.

"To be sure he is almost twenty years older than Jean," she thought; "and that is a great deal even on the right side. Jean is such a child too. It would be absurd to think of anything at present. But some day, three or four years hence—if Giles is not married then, I don't see why it should be impossible. Such a wife as Jean, might be the making of Giles. If anybody could ever get him to work, it would be some one like Jean—always busy. If not, there is no reason why they should not live comfortably on fifteen hundred a year. It sounds like wealth to me! Only of course, Giles could not get quite so many waist-coats, or have such very expensive cigars. He seems taken with the child; and Jean is friendly with him." Mrs. Trevelyan smiled contentedly over her little castle in the air. "I shall write and tell Stewart how well she is looking. He really must let me keep her six weeks or two months now she is here."

Five weeks at the Cottage! Jean could better have believed in five months. The novel ideas and events of each day in Wufflestone lengthened it out to her mental sensations, while each hour flew with speed.

Everything here was different from home. The little dainty house and garden; the dilettante manner of living; the slow meals; the placid tempers; the abundant leisure; the dearth of needlework; the absence of fault-finding; the supply of new books—all these were unwonted and for the time charming.

Dearly as Jean loved Dulveriford Rectory, and the associations of her childhood, she was of too vivid and malleable a nature not to rejoice in the new knowledge springing from now surroundings. Jean learnt more of ease, of freedom, of frank girlish simplicity in those weeks, than in all her previous life. She learnt to hold her own in good-humoured argument; to stand being laughed at, and sometimes even to make others laugh; to be mistress of herself, not alone in action but also in manner. Rigid reserve was fast thawing, and she allowed herself to be affectionate to Mrs. Trevelyan.

This easy mode of existence did not spoil Jean. The reign of duty in her life was too strong to be so soon disturbed; and while her nature, like all sensitive natures—by "sensitive" I do not mean ill-tempered—was peculiarly open to new impressions, her principles were firm. She had no wish to live always such a life; but there was a wondrous charm in its freshness.

Perhaps the most curious part of these weeks to Jean, was the finding herself so completely cut off from home interests. Neither Mr. Trevelyan nor Madame Collier were good correspondents, and Jean seldom had a line from

either; nor did Evelyn write. Mrs. Trevelyan inquired duly at intervals after Jean's home-people; but she knew nothing of Dulveriford, nothing of the Brow, the Gorge, or Dutton, nothing of Miss Devereux, Cyril, Evelyn, or the General.

Jean had been at first glad to escape questioning about late events, yet it seemed singular that Mrs. Trevelyan should not have heard more. Jean knew that Jem liked and admired Evelyn—as who did not?—and she wondered that he had not more fully related to his mother the tragical end of Evelyn's married life.

Mrs. Trevelyan did indeed once allude to—"that poor old gentleman, Jean, who was frozen to death—General What-was-his-name? And you were actually there yourself and saw it all, poor child!"

But Jean's constrained answer drew no further show of interest, and the matter was not again spoken of.

Jem's proposed appearance had been repeatedly deferred, through pressure of work.

"Don't let Jean go home, until I have seen her," he wrote more than once to his mother, and at length a day was fixed early in April.

"The very day of the party at the Hall," said Mrs. Trevelyan, after reading the letter. "Well, that cannot be helped. If Jem arrives in time, he must go with us; but the evening train is more likely, he says."

"What party?" asked Giles.

"Mrs. Wiggins—to afternoon tea. I suppose it is partly in honour of Jean; so of course we must go. She made a great point of my taking Jean; and she wants you too, Giles. I

told her I would try: but I was not hopeful. If you could make up your mind once—"

"Thanks, ma'am!"

Giles' tone was sufficient, and Mrs. Trevelyan sank into acquiescence.

Jean would gladly have escaped the ordeal, had freedom of choice been permitted; but Mrs. Trevelyan was so placidly sure of her delight in the treat, that nobody could have the heart to undeceive her. Jean disliked strangers, and was not captivated by Mrs. Wiggins. Still, the thing had to be endured; and she was prepared to endure heroically.

The Wigginses were so excruciatingly correct that they introduced nobody to anybody. This was the rule of the house. Indiscriminate introductions are not "the thing;" but neither is it to be accounted "the thing" to plant an absolute stranger amid a group of people, all mutually acquainted, who will leave her socially out in the cold.

Those who meet under the roof of a common friend ought, no doubt, to be able to exchange ideas without being formally named one to another; and the absence of introductions presupposes this possibility. English people are not yet cured of shyness, however; and even while tabooing introduction, they too often wait rigidly for it.

Jean found this to her cost. She was welcomed cordially, separated from Mrs. Trevelyan, placed among a group of strangers, and there left to her own devices. She had seen a good many Wufflestone people in the last few weeks, but not a single acquaintance happened to be "within hailing distance." Around were grouped ladies, old and young, all ladylike in appearance, and all seemingly well acquainted.

They chatted freely together, and most of them used their eyes upon Jean, but none spoke to her.

For nearly an hour she sat thus, wondering how long the condition of things was to last. Tea brought round formed her one diversion. She could not see Mrs. Trevelyan. Mrs. Wiggins once flitted up for a remark, and flitted away again, taking no further trouble.

Internally, Jean grow indignant. It seemed unfair and uncourteous that she should be pressed to come to the house, and that not an effort should be made for her entertainment. She thought with longing of the cosy cottage drawing-room, and of Giles' amusing conversation. Then she wandered to recollections of home and of Evelyn—the gentle and gracious Evelyn, who would never so neglect her guests.

"Not even if she disliked them," thought Jean.

A few yards distant was a closed conservatory door. Jean growing tired of her position, rose at length and made her way thither. The movement drew general attention, for which Jean cared little. She glanced across the room, caught a glimpse of Mrs. Trevelyan on a distant sofa, exchanged a smile with her, then wandered off alone into the deserted conservatory. To close the glass door was her first care, with a sense of satisfaction in shutting off those unsociable people. Then she stole happily from plant to plant, studying the fair make of one, inhaling the sweetness of another, entirely content.

From the long conservatory, a door led into a fernery, where green things clustered in a bower, with ceaseless trickle of water. Jean was charmed. She sat down on a jutting corner of rock-work, opposite a great mass of large-leaved

Maidenhair, the delicate new fronds of which were salmon-tinted, shading into green; and there she gave herself up to enjoyment.

Somebody coming in did not at once arouse her. Not till a shadow fell across the salmon gleam of the Maidenhair, did she look up.

"Jem!"

"I managed to get off pretty early. How do you do, Jean? Giles sent me after you both."

"Cousin Chrissie is in the drawing-room."

"I have seen her, and paid my respects to Mrs. Wiggins."

"Was I wrong to come out? I did get so tired of doing nothing; and nobody spoke to me."

"Why?"

"I don't know. Because I am a stranger, I suppose. But should you not have thought that a reason the other way? People ought to be kind. And I am only a girl, so it was hardly my place to begin upon them. I don't mind now. It is delicious among the ferns. Did cousin Chrissie send you to me?"

"She said I might find you here. Shall we go into the garden?"

"May we? Would it be polite?"

"Somebody is going to drive my mother home, and she has undertaken to make your apologies to Mrs. Wiggins. I told

her I should carry you off. It is all right. We know Mrs. Wiggins well."

He opened the outer door, and Jean questioned no further. One of their old free talks together would be delightful. She never felt so much at her ease with anybody as with Jem, because never so sure of being understood.

Conversation did not at once flow. Jem led away from the house, through the garden, into a lane beyond, which Jean knew to mean a considerable round, before they could get home. She was ready for any amount of exercise—only, would not his mother want him? And what made Jem so grave? Had he something on his mind?

The lane curved hither and thither, in aimless fashion: having on either side a hedge, with trees at intervals. Slanting rays from the sun lighted up the right hand hedge with a dim glory, and fell upon the patches of dull lichen which decorated an aged elm trunk, smitten into ruggedness by prolonged hardships of wind and weather.

"Things are beautiful everywhere," said Jean. "Even in a flat country like this."

"It is not Dulveriford," responded Jem. And as if this supplied the opening for which he had waited, he went on—

"How is your father? And—" in a lower voice, "Mrs. Villiers?"

Jean had much to tell, for she found that he knew little. Home interests never far distant came on her in a rush, as he listened, drawing out further details by a murmured syllable now and then. After long silence on Dulveriford subjects, it was natural to pour out; and she gave abundant particulars of the evening which had left Mrs. Villiers a widow. Only, about the little boudoir scene between

husband and wife, a scene of which she had been an unwilling witness, and which had been rendered by after-events doubly sacred, Jean said not a word.

"It was an ordeal for you," Jem remarked.

"One could not think of oneself at such a time. For Evelyn it was terrible. To be there on the spot, and to see him! But even my father could not keep her back."

"And since then she has been—"

"Very, very sad. I don't think I should have expected—But nobody ever knows beforehand. She seems to feel that everything is gone, and that her life is at an end."

"You would not have expected what?"

"Ought I to say it? One feels some things that one does not like to speak out. Only—to you—may I not? He was so good and kind—but still so very much older, and different in every way. Yet now one might fancy that her life had been perfect; even though one knows how things really were."

"The manner of her loss must have intensified it. The shock and suddenness—"

"I dare say that had something to do with her feeling. It was all very dreadful. It couldn't help being so. And besides—" Jean hesitated, falling into a slower walk. "I suppose it is sometimes worse to lose anybody, if—Worse in one way, I mean—"

"If there has not been perfect oneness? If there has been friction?"

"Yes, I see you understand. I didn't half like to say it—unless you knew . . . Evelyn seems to feel that she must do every single thing, exactly as he would have wished. She reads all the little books and sermons that he liked. I suppose they helped him; but I don't believe they help her. And she has locked up some of her own books, which do help her, because he didn't like them. And she always goes to St. John's—twice every Sunday—never to our Church. And she tries so hard to like his friends better than her own."

Jem understood. "You see less of her now?"

"Yes—"

"How did it come about?"

"I hardly know. There was a difference from the first. Not in herself! Evelyn could not be fickle. But I suppose people may draw back on principle. She told me plainly that it had to be so. She said it was for his sake—to honour his memory. She will not hear a word said about General Villiers that sounds like blame. Not even about the will."

Jem made a sound of inquiry.

"Have you not heard?"

"I have heard nothing. Your father sent six lines, and nobody else wrote."

"I didn't know how much I ought to say. Everything is left to Evelyn for her lifetime; but only so long as she does not marry again. If she marries, she loses the whole. There would be a little annuity of something under two hundred pounds, and that is all. Doesn't it seem odd? As if General Villiers had wanted to keep her from marrying!—And she so

young and so sweet! If he really loved her, would he not want her to be happy?"

"The best of men are not perfect, Jean!"—in muffled undertone.

"No, not perfect—but—Everybody is talking and wondering. And Evelyn will only say that he was right. She says he has provided for her lifetime, because she could never dream of marrying again. My father smiles about that; but I am sure she means it."

"She may—" and a pause.

"If her husband had not been so old! But I can't understand General Villiers making such a will. No really nice man could ask her to marry him, unless he were rich himself. She would have to give up everything."

Jean had been gazing on the ground as she talked. Now she looked up, and something in Jem's face brought a sense of troubled wonder. Had Jean been a few years older, she would not have seemed to see; but girls of sixteen do not always know exactly when to be silent; and Jean, though in general reserved, was outspoken with Jem. After one moment's blank pause, she said involuntarily—

"I am sorry! I ought not to have told you!"

"Why ought you not?"

"If you mind so much—"

"As well hear through you as anybody else!" Jem spoke shortly, with a forced smile. Then, noting her grieved look: "My dear Jean, you are too observant. You must learn to shut your eyes more."

"But—"

"There is no need to discuss the question. As for General Villiers, neither you nor I have to sit in judgment on him. He probably had reasons which seemed weighty to himself—"

"But, Jem—"

"Whether or no they are weighty to other people. Well?"
With a touch of impatience. "You wish to say something."

"Only about what I said just now. I mean, about nobody being able to propose to Evelyn, unless he were rich. I did not think—"

"You said what was perfectly true. No need to qualify it . . . I don't deny that I once had a passing dream—and possibly it has revived lately. But in any case, it could never have come to anything. Don't you see? Our spheres are altogether different. My life-work is among the poor and needy; and she is trained to luxury."

"You think so ill of Evelyn!"—reproachfully.

"Ill of her!" Jem's face changed and whitened. "She has been to me as a vision of an angel!" he said huskily. "You little know—! . . . Come, we must go on, Jean. And mind—all this is strictly for yourself—not to be alluded to again."

Jean only said, "No."

Jem strode fast by her side, regaining his usual look.

"I must tell you that I have had an offer of an East-End living. Not much pay, but plenty of work. Yes, I shall accept it, certainly."

A week later, Jean had her first letter from Evelyn. The opening page or two told nothing. Then came a glimpse of the real writer.

"I want to hear all about yourself, Jean—all you are doing and thinking. I want something fresh—something outside my own life.

"The Dutton world drags on wearisomely, just the same. I am getting slowly petrified. If I were more like him—but I cannot alter my nature, and the things that did him good, do me harm. The same medicines don't cure all men's bodies, you know; and I never can see why it should not be so with our inner selves as well. One man's spiritual meat may be another man's spiritual poison. I can say this to you, because you will understand—you will not misjudge my words. Mr. Kennedy's soothing sermons are only narcotics to me; and too much of narcotics is not good. I want to be roused and braced, not to be put to sleep . . . I have made up my mind to endure patiently for a few months more, and then I shall go abroad. But this is for yourself alone."

BOOK III.

ACTION AND REACTION.

"But it is much that high things are, to
know,
That deep things are, to feel."

JEAN
INGELOW.

CHAPTER I.

A ROUGH DIAMOND.

"O let me be myself! But where, O where,
Under this heap of precedent, this mound
Of customs, modes and maxims, cumbrance rare,
Shall the Myself be found?"

JEAN INGELOW.

"JEAN, make haste! I shall be late! Do call your father—find him, wherever he is. If I miss this train, I shall be late for the boat; and cross at night I will not! Nothing shall induce

me! I would rather sleep in a bathing-machine! If one has to be drowned, one may as well see how it comes about. Find your father, and tell him I must and will get into the train. It will be off directly!"

"He is coming, aunt Marie. He only went to look at the book-stall."

"Absurd! As if he would not have plenty of time, after I am gone. Well, you can help me to take all these packages nearer. One—two—three. Let me see—there were eleven, besides my two trunks."

"He told us to stay here till he came back."

"That is always the way. He likes to put off till the last moment; and I hate not having plenty of time. There! I knew it! The bell! I shall be left behind. Jean, bring what you can."

To see the true British female, untrammelled by etiquette, one only needs to view her in full career along a platform, charging the wrong train. Restraint at such a moment vanishes, and aristocratic repose is nowhere. Sometimes the true British male condescends to show his undisguised self in a like manner; at least, so far as flurry and flying coat-tails are concerned; but more commonly his rôle is the dignified punctuality, which has not five seconds to spare, yet which never expects anything so preposterous as that he should be left behind.

Jean overtook Madame Collier, close to the train.

"Don't get in, aunt. This is not yours."

"Not for Folkestone! You are sure?" Madame Collier released the door-handle with a gasp of relief. Her short skirts were

tucked up, as if for the wading of a Dulveriford marsh; and her poke bonnet was crooked with mental agitation. Jean gently pulled the bonnet straight, and led Madame Collier again to the forsaken heap of packages.

"I almost wish we had arranged to go with you as far as Folkestone."

"What for? Nonsense, Jean? Mere waste of money. I hate travelling, but I know how to manage. I'm not a minikin finikin creature, like Sybella Devereux, afraid to put my nose inside a train without somebody to back me up. That's not my sort!" She certainly did not look minikin or finikin, seated on a small hamper, with her strongly-outlined face and vigorous personality.

"But you don't like going alone."

"Who said I did? Doing a thing doesn't mean liking it, nine times in ten, with people who are worth anything. It only means not being beaten. I don't like going to France at all, if you come to that. People, are not born into the world just to do what they like," declared Madame Collier, mopping her countenance with a handkerchief of large and substantial make. She disdained what she called "those flibbertigibbet squares," patronised by modern ladies. "It's pretty much the other way commonly, if one's got any stuff in one. I hate Paris—great frivolous place—and that's exactly why I have to live there. If I wanted to go, I shouldn't be allowed."

"Is one never allowed to do what one wishes?" asked Jean.

The doctrine was not new to her, but it sounded dismal.

"Well—some people sometimes—perhaps. Soft folks need a lot of bolstering up, and hard ones take a lot of knocking

down. I've had most of the knocking down work. Not much of feather-beds or dainty pillows. And I've needed it, of course, or I shouldn't have had it. People aren't bothered without reason. My corners had to be scraped off, I suppose; and they're not all off yet," added the good lady, showing unusual self-knowledge. "That's why this has come, just when I thought I was settled for life. Nobody ought ever to think that, I do believe; for there's never any knowing what will come next. The Trevelyan's haven't much softness about them; and you are a Trevelyan. You won't be tucked up on a feather-bed all your life. There's more to be got out of you than that."

"I hope so!"

"Anyhow, I'd sooner be the one to do things for other people, than be one of the logs that make things for others to do," said Madame Collier. "Till I'm old and ill, I mean. There's the whistle."

"Only for this train."

"And I believe it is mine, after all. Look at the clock. Well—too late now," resignedly. Then, reverting to a former remark, "No, I don't want you all the way down to Folkestone. What's the good? I've no notion of dragging out good-byes. When a leg has to be cut off, the sooner it's done, the better! There's one thing I want to say to you, Jean. About your father—"

"Yes."

"He isn't so young as he was. Only sixty, and that's not old. At least, it needn't be. A man with your father's constitution, who has lived as he has lived, needn't be old at seventy. But he ought to have common-sense, and not expect to do everything the same as he did at thirty. You

needn't fancy things are wrong—only keep watch, and be reasonable for him, if he won't be reasonable for himself."

One of the inevitable changes, which come sooner or later to us all as life rolls on, had come to Jean Trevelyan, after years of a steady jog-trot in one groove.

Madame Collier had received an unexpected call to a new sphere of work. Her husband's only brother, M. Arnaud Collier, died suddenly, leaving a semi-invalid wife and nine children, with small means. The widow was weak and incapable, and the older children were boys, none over sixteen in age. An appeal for help, made to Madame Collier, met with a prompt response.

Why not? She was no longer a necessity at Dulveriford Rectory; her work there might be looked upon as accomplished. Not a doubt could exist as to where lay the greater need. Jean at twenty was fully competent to manage her father's small household: the widow was not competent; and Madame Collier, at fifty-five, was a strong woman still.

Feelings and wishes existed, of course. Madame Collier would be grieved to bid farewell to her home of many years. She hated travelling, as she said to Jean; detested children; and loathed change.

Moreover, Mr. Trevelyan and Jean would suffer at parting; for with all her ruggedness, Madame Collier had been a tried friend to them both. Sincere affection existed on either side, beneath a shell of reserve. What of all this? Nay, what of the fact that the loss of her personal income would entail some measure of straitness upon the Rectory household? The question, as it came before their minds, was not at all what any of them might like or wish, but simply, what was

the right thing to do? If Madame Collier and her money were needed in France, then she had no business at Dulveriford. The stern Trevelyan sense of duty rose in its might, and settled the question without delay.

In one week, Madame Collier had wound up her English affairs, had packed her personal effects, and was on the road.

Mr. Trevelyan and Jean accompanied her to London. Mr. Trevelyan had business in Town, and he counted it a good opportunity to give Jean a little change.

"There it is! There's the bell! Jean, I can't wait any longer. My train will be off, I know. We are on the wrong platform. Tell your father—"

"Here he comes!"

"Stewart, I am losing my train."

Mr. Trevelyan seemed to be chewing the cud of meditation. He surveyed his sister and her regiment of parcels, with a gaze which found utterance in the query—

"Why did you not bring another trunk?"

"They charge so for luggage abroad. You saw what I had before, so there's no need to bother. If my train is off, I declare I will not cross at night. I'm quite determined. If I have to be drowned, I'll be drowned in daylight."

Mr. Trevelyan signed to a porter to come near.

"Folkestone train?" he said.

"Just coming in, sir."

"Bring these packages."

"Well, you are right for once, but I hate putting off till the last moment; it's such a risk. Make the man bring everything. Eleven altogether—a roll of shawls, two bandboxes, two hampers, two bags, two brown-paper parcels—"

"Come along!" quoth Mr. Trevelyan.

"I mean to have all these with me. Not in the van."

"Come, Marie."

Madame Collier obeyed, then broke loose, and rushed ahead, peering into one carriage window after another, as the train backed into position.

"Not a smoking carriage. I can't stand smoking! It ought to be put down by Act of Parliament. I declare there's nothing but smoking carriages. Bah!" with ineffable disgust in the twist of her nose and mouth. "No, not there, Stewart! I won't be close behind a smoking carriage. And not too much in front. If there's a collision, people in front are sure to be killed. Not too far behind. If the train should be run into by an express—No, I must have a corner seat, close to a window, going forward."

It was not easy to meet all these requirements, but at length Madame Collier was placed, and the porter disposed of her belongings. Madame Collier counted and recounted, lost and found each packet in succession, fee'd her porter, and woke up to the consciousness of few minutes remaining. A frizzly-haired young woman on the opposite seat was bidding farewell to a frizzly-haired young woman on the platform, their heads filling the open window, while their shrill voices ran fast. Madame Collier, finding herself

thus debarred from her own relatives, proceeded to clear a way with scant ceremony:

"Now, young woman! It's my turn, if you please."

"What an old fogey!" murmured audibly the aggrieved individual outside.

Madame Collier disdained to notice the utterance.

"Things are all right now, I do believe," she said, breathing hard with her exertions. "Mind, Jean—I shall want to hear all about everybody. Don't forget to tell me if any more comes out about that man Barclay. And mind you don't go alone to his cottage. Give my love to Evelyn Villiers, when you see her. I wish she had come home before I left. She always was a favourite of mine, though you mayn't think it. Why, there's Jem!"

Jean and her father turned: and Jem Trevelyan came swiftly up.

"Just in time!" he said. "What a crowd! I was afraid I might miss you all. Well—" and his hand grasped Madame Collier's, "so you really are off?"

"Yes; I'm off!" Madame Collier's rugged features worked, and a tiny pool of water stood outside each eye, like a minute tarn upon a mountain height. "I'm off!" she repeated huskily. "It isn't what I should have chosen—of course. People are not allowed to choose for themselves—commonly! So much the better, perhaps."

"When they are, they often make a mess of it."

"You're right there! But this isn't choosing. It just—has to be!" She was obliged to haul out the big pocket-

handkerchief, since those two little tarns were growing bigger, and threatened to give birth to rivulets. "Leaving Jean, you know—and all! But there! What has to be, has to be. Rose Collier is no more good than an infant. Can't think what business such people have to marry! I've got to go, though—of course."

"Paris is no distance off in these days. You'll soon be running over to see us all again. And we will take care of Jean."

"Yes, do!"

Jean was quiet and rather white. Laying a gloved hand on her aunt's, she was amazed to have it carried to Madame Collier's lips.

"Aunt Marie! Don't!"

"You'll be a good girl, I know, to your father!" jerked out Madame Collier, thrusting away the hand, as if ashamed of her own emotion, while her chest heaved. "I'm sure to have left—something—behind me! Eleven packages—and—But I'm glad to have seen you again, Jem. Oswald was to have been here. Didn't come, of course, just at last. And they said you were—out of Town."

"Till late last night," said Jem, touched by Madame Collier's manful struggles. He had not known before the strength of feeling which underlay her rugged shell. He bent forward, with a glance of apology towards Jean, and murmured something into Madame Collier's ear.

"I can't hear. Say it again. No—really? I am glad! Things do come about queerly. Mind you don't change your mind. Oh, keep off—there's the whistle. Don't get knocked down and killed, whatever you do. I wouldn't have that on my

conscience! Good-bye, Stewart. Good-bye, Jean. Keep off—trains are so dangerous. I am glad, Jem! Bah, what a whiff of tobacco! Good-bye."

The poke bonnet continued to waggle till out of sight.

Jem turned to look at Jean.

"Excuse my whisper," he said. "I'll tell you by-and-by what I said."

"It's all right. I am glad you could say anything to please her."

Jean looked rather forlorn, not disposed to tears, but as if something had gone out of her existence, leaving a gap, and as if she did not know what to do next.

Mr. Trevelyan's "Come along!" was a relief. Nobody ever saw Mr. Trevelyan in doubt as to his next step.

"Where are you staying?" Jem asked, as they moved out of the station.

"Two streets off," Jean told him.

In some rooms, recommended by a friend. Jean herself would have liked the novelty of an hotel; but expense had to be considered: and daily table d'hôte was not in Madame Collier's line. She believed they would stay three more nights. Oswald was to have spent this day with them, and to have taken Jean after lunch to the Academy; but thus far he had failed to appear.

"I don't know how to manage, if he does not turn up," said Mr. Trevelyan. "I shall be engaged all the afternoon."

Jem offered himself promptly. If Oswald came not, he would be entirely at Jean's disposal.

"Thanks! Pity she should waste a whole afternoonindoors," said Mr. Trevelyan, after a moment's weighing of proprieties. "Yes—you are one of us—and a cousin too. I don't see why not."

"It is only carrying out my promise to Madame Collier. What shall we do, Jean? The Academy? No, you would rather keep that for Oswald. What do you say to a trip on the river —up to Richmond by steamboat?"

CHAPTER II.

OLD FATHER THAMES.

"I'm a woman, sir,—
I use the woman's figures naturally.
. . . So I wish you well,
I'm simply sorry for the griefs you've had."

E. B.

BROWNING.

OSWALD had not turned up when they reached the lodgings. A note was there, apologising for his failure, which of course "could not be helped," and promising to appear next day—a great relief to Jean. His defection had troubled her sorely, and she was thankful to know—or at least to be assured—that he was not blameable. Jean believed in Oswald as of old, loving him with the warmest love she had at command. No human being had ever yet been dearer to her than Oswald, and nothing else could equal that delight of her heart, a day with Oswald. As of old, she lavished pure gold, to receive brass in exchange.

Still, an afternoon with Jem brought pleasure. She had always looked up to Jem, rested on Jem's judgment, given Jem cousinly affection. There was a placid satisfaction in the certainty that Jem never misunderstood her, which she could not feel in Oswald's companionship.

The two had not met for more than a year, and Jem studied Jean carefully through lunch.

She had altered, even during those months, and much more during the years since General Villiers' death.

Jean had reposeful manners, old for her age. She was tall and slender; and her features had worked their way to regularity of outline. A slight droop in the eyelids gave shade, the month had gained in mobility and sweetness, the paleness was not sallow in kind. Moreover, the eyebrows seemed to have grown darker, the lips were redder, and the hair, for years clipped short, had expanded into a goodly mass of gamboge-brown.

Of course she had not yet come to her full development. Who has, at twenty? Unless it be a mushroom specimen of human nature. But strength and gentleness were there

already, in balanced combination. Jean had not grown like a crooked apple-tree, all to one side.

Simplicity of dress remained, characteristic in kind. Boots and gloves were irreproachable. Superfluous trimmings were non-existent. The severe folds of her skirt gained grace from the figure they clothed, and the neat cap, thrown aside during lunch, was almost boy-like in its plainness; only nothing could look boy-like over that pure womanly face.

It was the face of one to be not only loved, but leant upon. You might be sure, so leaning, that Jean would not give way beneath the strain. Giving way is commonly far more a matter of weak will, than of weak muscle, bodily or mental. Jean might break, but she would not bend. It is the feeble natures that bend. The strong hold out, and rather die than yield.

Jean studied Jem in return; not quite able to make him out. A certain burden pressed upon him, which he failed to hide. The grey eyes were troubled beneath their pleasant sparkle, and a weight on the forehead drew the brows often together. Jean had seen him burdened before, and she always had a theory ready to account for it. True, the weight to-day was something new, since for years past his life had seemed to be full of sunshine, yet she reverted at once to her old explanation. Was it Evelyn again?—Evelyn Villiers, disturbing his peace? Had he somehow heard that after nearly four years abroad, she was returning to Dutton Park?—Nay, that she might already be in London?

"I shall leave you to amuse one another," Mr. Trevelyan said, rising. "Don't expect me till seven. You will dine with us, of course, Jem."

Then he was gone, and they made their way river-wards; Jean with her old sense of repose under Jem's protection, and her old trust that he was sure always to do right. It was a confidence soon to have a rude shake.

"I'm perfectly happy, left to myself. There's no need to talk to me."

Jem looked round, smiling. They had secured good stern-seats, near the wheel, and apart from other people.

"Some occult meaning underlies that assertion. I don't fathom it."

"I only thought you might feel bound to amuse me; and I am not one of the people who need to be amused."

"Profoundly true. But how if I want to hear Dulveriford news?"

"Evelyn!" flashed anew through Jean's mind.

"I don't know where to begin; and there is not much going on. Of course you have heard that Canon Meyers is going away. He will be a great loss, dear old man. Nobody is appointed yet in his stead . . . Mr. Kennedy has a curate—that is something new. A very hardworking young man, I believe—and rather given to arguments. Miss Devereux thinks him delightful . . . She talks of spending part of Cyril's vacation at the Brow this autumn, and at Christmas, he will have done with Oxford. Isn't it odd how she has kept him away from home? He and I have not once met for fifteen months."

"I am told that he is a good-looking young fellow."

"Mrs. Kennedy calls him a 'lovely youth'!"

"H'm!"

"And Miss Devereux says he has such a sweetly aristocratic air."

"And Jean—?"

"Oh, I like him, of course; we always have been friends. He is too much 'one of England's curled darlings' for my taste; but when you have a friend, you don't give him up for his looks. I wish he were not quite so dainty. But I'm speaking of more than a year ago. He may have changed any amount."

Jem seemed to be thinking of something else.

"So you have not yet heard who is to be the Canon's successor! What would you say if it were I?"

Jean laughed as at a joke.

"But seriously! I have had the offer."

"You don't think of accepting it!"

"Yes." Jem was smiling.

Jean showed no pleasure. She asked abruptly, "Do you mean it?"

"Why not? The one living is nearly seven hundred a year; the other is not two hundred. What do you think?"

"It doesn't matter what people think . . . I would rather not give any opinion. One person can't judge for another . . . It is not my business;" as he waited still. "Everybody will like to have you at Dutton—of course; How soon do we get to Richmond?"

"Suppose you answer my question first?"

"I can't. There's nothing to answer. What a horrible jangle!"
as two or three discordant instruments struck up on deck.

"No use to talk against such a noise."

Jem acquiesced, and they sank into silence; Jean turning away a troubled face. Jem had suddenly dropped from a high pedestal in her imagination; and how high the pedestal had been, whereon he was wont to sit, Jean had never known till now. She was vexed at the strength of her own pain and displeasure. That Jem should so fail—! Anybody else except Jem!

Oswald always pleased himself by following the easy path of what he liked; and nobody ever expected Oswald to do anything else; but Jem—why, she had always looked upon him as the living embodiment of self-denial; and here was he, just like any commonplace man, snatching at personal advantage the moment it offered itself, forsaking the post of toil and difficulty, for which he had seemed especially fitted, and for which he had professed an ardent love. Jean wrung her gloved fingers together, and could almost have wept in girlish disappointment at this dethroning of her hero—if she had been alone.

No more words were spoken till they reached Richmond. Jem was in no haste to justify himself. Jean mutely followed his lead off the steamer, across the landing-place, and through the town to the Park gates. Then Jem paused to ask—Should they lounge under the trees, or walk to the White Lodge?

"Walk, please!" Jean answered promptly.

Jem smiled to himself, reading her wish to evade further questions. He did not mean to let her off; but there was no

harm in delay; and for the next hour or more they discussed literature, eschewing personal matters.

"Jean, we have been at it a good while now! Do you ever cry 'Enough'?"

"Enough walking? No, I am not tired. But perhaps you are."

"There's a little snuggery under the trees yonder—pretty view, and nobody at hand. You don't feel the least wish to sit down."

"I could go on any amount, but most people can't," said Jean, with reluctant acquiescence.

Jem was content. He led the way to the "snuggery," spread Jean's light cloak for her to sit on, and threw himself down, as if not sorry to rest. Some measure of fatigue might be excusable on so hot a day for two such rapid walkers. They had not only viewed the White Lodge, but had taken a wide détour on their return, getting within twenty minutes of the Park entrance before Jem proposed a halt. Jean looked fresh and cool, as if she had just started.

"We must allow ourselves time to get a cup of tea on our way to the steamer," Jem remarked, pulling out his watch. "No, of course—not necessary. You are above bodily needs! But they exist in other people."

Then he replaced the watch, and asked, "Desperately disappointed in me, Jean?"

"I can't see why we need go into the question. Everybody has a right to his own opinion."

"I wish all the world could see the truth of that axiom. But perhaps some people also have a right to ask the opinions of some others."

"Not mine!"

"My dear Jean! When I have known you from babyhood!"

"But if I can't say what you would like—"

"Then say what I shall not like."

Another break.

"After all, there's no need. I can understand your view of the matter. For years I have counted myself definitely called to East-End work, and dedicated to it, so far as I might choose, for the best years of my life. And you have felt with me. Yes, I have been sure of your sympathy . . . But one is not always allowed to do what one likes best! . . . What if I am now definitely called away to other work?"

"It must be difficult to feel sure."

"Indications are pretty clear sometimes . . . The oddest part of the matter is that I shall be looked upon as choosing the easy and luxurious path—as giving up hardship for the sake of comfort."

"It will be easier."

"Will it? I am not so sure. But in your place, no doubt I should think the same. Perhaps—" with a curious smile, "I had expected Jean to see a little deeper than other people. Hardly reasonable, was it? When I have not given you the clue. My mother has lost all her money—literally the whole! Apart from me, she will not have a shilling that she can call

her own. I have to make a home for her—and I could not do so comfortably on my present income. Nor could I take her to the East-End. She is elderly and delicate, and used to pretty surroundings."

He turned a stirred face towards Jean.

"Now do you see?"

"O Jem, I am so sorry."

She was sorry for his trouble, and still more for her own hasty judgment. Why had she not at least waited to hear his reasons? Compunction for some seconds was sharp; and then a recollection of Evelyn came. Did Jem know her plans? If not, he ought to be told.

"I am so sorry," she repeated. "Yes of course—you could not possibly do anything else. Her comfort must be your first care. Unless—Mr. Cuthbert—"

"Giles never has enough for his own needs; and I cannot shift my responsibility on another."

"And a living somewhere else—"

"Would not be the same to my mother. Next to Wufflestone, she would rather live at Dutton than in any place. Besides, no other living half so good is likely to be offered to me; and for her sake, I must think of the money. Why should I hesitate?"

Jean spoke with downcast eyes. "Have you thought of one thing? If Evelyn were at home—"

"Ah, you are remembering my old fancy," said Jem cheerfully. "At present, most unlikely that she should."

"But she is coming!"

"For a month?"

"No: to settle down. She is tired of travelling; and she has found a friend to live with her. It is not to be talked of till just before she arrives; because she dislikes Dutton gossip."

"No surer way to be talked about than to have a secret afloat."

"It is safe with you. I thought I ought to mention this before you decide about the living."

"That is decided. No other course lies open to me. I do not see how Mrs. Villiers' plans can effect mine."

Jean wondered how much or how little this meant. He went into particulars as to the loss of Mrs. Trevelyan's income, through the failure in quick succession of two companies, wherein her all was invested.

"I blame myself for not having looked into matters more thoroughly," he said. "I have trusted too much to others; and she has been ill-advised. The least I can do now is, at any cost, to provide for her."

"You could not possibly do anything else," repeated Jean.

"Time for us to be going," Jem remarked presently, and he found his way to his feet; then stood for some seconds deep in thought. "One word! About what you were saying just now. Remember, that is a thing of the past."

Jean assented with a monosyllable.

"You were right to mention Mrs. Villiers' plans; but they can make no difference . . . Mrs. Villiers is nothing to me, nor I to her, beyond a pleasant acquaintanceship. Nothing further is possible—if I wished it! Her husband's will is an insuperable barrier for any poor man . . . You once found out what you were not meant to know: and now you have to forget. You must not allow yourself even to think it! That fancy is dead! Do you see? . . . Jean, may I depend upon you absolutely—never to make allusion, by word or look—?"

Jean lifted her steadfast eyes, and answered, "Yes."

Jem smiled; for such an assurance from Jean was worth many vehement declarations from ordinary people.

"That will do," he said.

"I must do what I have promised, of course—and not let myself even think of him and Evelyn together," Jean observed to herself on the steamer. "But it is one thing to say that love is dead, and another thing to make it dead. Jem seems very sure of himself. How will it be when he sees Evelyn again? . . . He calls it 'a fancy.' Was it ever only that?"

CHAPTER III.

AMATEUR CRITICISM.

"Those busy subtle pronouns, I and Me,
Unsought and unexpected they appear;
No barriers heed they, and no laws revere;
But wind and penetrate, with dexterous force,
Through all the cracks and crannies of discourse."

JANE
TAYLOR.

JEAN, in her neat grey dress, and grey hat with grey ostrich feathers, sat near the window of the dull sitting-room, looking into the dull street. She was waiting for Oswald; waiting, not impatiently, but with a certain forlorn wistfulness. When she and Oswald made an appointment, a tacit understanding was always included that he would keep the appointment, should nothing more agreeable intervene, but that she would keep it in the face of all obstacles. So he could always be sure of Jean, and she could never be sure of Oswald.

All the same, Jean trusted him through thick and thin. She trusted him because she loved him. Trust founded on love is but a rickety structure, compared with that more solid erection, love founded on trust.

Mr. Trevelyan had again an engagement which could not be set aside, and he went, in displeasure at Oswald's non-appearance.

"It is too bad," he said. "Mind, Jean—if Jem or anybody looks in, and offers to take you anywhere, don't refuse."

But of course, she would refuse. She would have sat till Domesday, looking for Oswald, sooner than have risked

being absent when he did come.

This brother and sister, springing from the same stock, growing out of the same ground, surrounded by the same influences, had shot their branches in very different directions. In Oswald, self reigned supreme, and principle bowed before self-pleasing. He had indeed a certain Trevelyan hardihood and recklessness of danger; and in battle he would have rushed to the forefront without a thought of peril. But in everyday life, his personal comfort was a prime consideration; he liked an easy-chair existence, except during the intervals when amusement demanded exertion; and he spent a good deal of thought upon the pleasures of the palate.

Training can do much, but it cannot do everything. It is a mighty force for good or for evil; yet it has no power to change the actual texture of the substance on which it works. It can shape, subdue and modify, to almost any extent; but it cannot transform lead into gold, canvas into cambric.

A gardener has extraordinary power over plant-life, power to check or encourage growth; power to shape and modify. He can bring to splendour one attribute or another; he can let this or that part of a flower die out or become an abortion. But with all his cunning, he can never change a sunflower into a rose, or a cabbage into an oak. Each plant keeps untouched to the end its individuality.

Practically, no two persons, even of one family, ever can have precisely the same training, since variations are inevitable. In this case, not only had Jean always stayed at home, while Oswald went to school; but also Jean had been the worshipper, Oswald the worshipped; Jean had always yielded her will, Oswald had always gained his.

In any case, no training in the world could ever have made Jean into Oswald, nor Oswald into Jean, though it might have made something different of either.

His strong large figure, soldierly yet already inclining to stoutness, and his sunburnt self-satisfied visage were not more unlike Jean's slender form and refined outlines, than his whole inner being was unlike hers. So clear was the family perception of this fact, that the same was not expected from him as from Jean. That which in her would have been a heinous sin, was unhappily in him only what they had to expect. Deep in Mr. Trevelyan's heart lay a sore sense of disappointment about this only son; but he never spoke of it, even to Jean.

Past three o'clock! They had lunched at one, and Jean was beginning to feel rather hopeless. If he did not come, it would be a disappointment indeed. She had not seen him for months. Yet she waited quietly, with a book open on her knee, which she forced herself to read.

A ring at the front door.

"Oswald!" she said aloud, and a glow came to her cheeks.

"Sir Cyril Devereux!" was announced in stumbling accents by the awkward little maid.

"Jean! That's right! I was awfully afraid I shouldn't find you in! Jean, you do look handsome," exclaimed Cyril, greatly gratified, for the flush and radiance with which she had risen to welcome Oswald seemed to belong to himself. "I never saw you so handsome before. What is it? That dress! You never ought to put on anything but French grey for the rest of your life. But you haven't any flowers. You'll wear these—" and he placed in her hand two or three exquisite

rose-buds, half open, creamy and pink-tipped, with a softening spray of maidenhair.

"I had a hunt to find what I wanted; and then I was afraid I should be too late. Dear Jean, you do look nice," he went on with boyish eagerness, yet not so boyish as a year earlier.

His hair was more closely cut, his manner was more decisive, his complexion was more sunburnt. Nothing could lessen the prettiness of the violet eyes, yet even they had gained a spice of independence.

"You do look nice: I never saw you look better," he repeated, though by this time colour and shining were gone, and Jean was her quiet self, with difficulty veiling keen disappointment. "You don't mind my saying so, do you? And you are glad to see me, Jean?—just a little! The one thing I cared for in coming to Town was to get a sight of you. Everything else is so idiotically stupid."

"Cyril, don't be absurd."

"I'm not. It's other folk that are absurd. What are you going to do with yourself this afternoon? You ought to be seen."

"As if anybody in London cared for my looks! Do talk sensibly."

"I'll try." Cyril sat down in an easy attitude, facing Jean. "You haven't told me yet—are you pleased to see me again? After such an age! I told aunt Sybella that go home I would this summer; and if she chose to stay away, I should go alone. So she cried and gave in. Crying doesn't mean much with her. Just a little ebullition of feeling. Such rot! Tearing over the Continent for nothing. I've seen ruined castles enough to last for twenty years. Well, you haven't told me yet—are you pleased?"

"You don't allow one a chance to say anything. Cyril, I do believe you never will grow up."

"Grow up! I'm five foot ten and three-quarters, and not narrow in proportion. How many extra yards do you want? Jem is no more; and Oswald is only five foot eleven and a half."

"Oswald would make two of you!" with a disdainful glance.

"Can't help not being corpulent. Is that what you want? I've tried no end of processes, and they don't answer. People are not all made alike, you know."

"I suppose not," Jean answered, dimly aware that her quondam slave was no longer absolutely subservient as of old. It had not been his wont to jest over any expression of opinion from her. "Where is Evelyn now?"

"Didn't you know? Staying at the Métropole; and she wants you to meet her at the Academy this afternoon. I'm to take you there. It's all right—Evelyn has settled things. Didn't you know she was in Town?"

"I was not sure as to dates. Hush—is that Oswald? No, I'm afraid I can't come, thanks. Oswald will be here, and he has promised to take me."

"To the Academy? That's right. We'll all go together; and I shall have you to myself. How jolly!"

By no means jolly in Jean's eyes! Her hopes of a long afternoon with Oswald were dying out. Yet, what could she say? To meet Evelyn would be a delight; only nicer in private, and this Jean suggested.

"Couldn't be a more private place than the Exhibition. Everybody is lost in a crowd. So you haven't seen Evelyn yet—or her new crony?"

"Miss Moggridge?"

"Hideous specimen of womankind!"

"Evelyn wrote from Milan where they first met, and said she was plain but charming."

"'Plain' is not the word. It's bald ugliness. No eyes or nose worth mentioning; thick lips; liver-coloured complexion; tow-coloured hair. I always counted Evelyn too sensible a woman to go in for gush; but one never knows. She's infatuated now, and no mistake. Imagine setting up house with such a companion! However, Miss Moggridge won't be at the Academy to-day. Seedy, I believe; or writing a pamphlet. Just the sort of person to pour out pamphlets by the dozen . . . I say, Jean, you won't wait much longer, if Oswald does not come. Evelyn is expecting us."

Jean was spared the need of reply; for another ring sounded, and Oswald strolled in, with his old confident air. No longer a dusty and begrimed school-boy, but a well-dressed and well-drilled young officer of Her Majesty's Service, he seemed superlatively content with himself, and not unwilling to patronise less favoured mortals. As Jean had said, he was considerably bigger than Cyril, who looked very boyish by his side. Oswald's movements were large as well as his frame, taking up a good deal of room; and the superiority of air sat rather oddly upon only three-and-twenty years. Aristocratic traditions reigned in Oswald's breast, as in Jean's: but to outward appearance he was rather military than aristocratic; and the chivalrous spirit, which ought, as a matter of noblesse oblige, always to

accompany such traditions, was reserved for outsiders, thereby proving its non-genuine nature. Jean at least received no benefit from it.

Though able to make himself tolerably agreeable in society, he seldom exerted himself to be agreeable to his home-circle. The joyous beaming of Jean's face had no particular response; and if Jean did not notice the omission, perhaps because she was used to it, Cyril did, and was indignant.

"Couldn't get here sooner," was Oswald's sole apology for the long delay. He would have been profuse enough, had any lady except his sister been the one concerned. "I knew you'd wait for me. Ready? Come along!"

Jean pulled on her gloves, with a nervous trepidation, which Oswald alone had power to raise in her.

"I am going too. My sister will be there," Cyril said decisively, not asking leave.

Evelyn could not be immediately found in the crowds which thronged the Academy. She had appointed a meeting-place in the fourth room, if they should fail to see one another sooner.

Oswald was bent on taking each picture, big or little, in solemn succession; and Jean seemed in no haste. Merely to be by Oswald's side was happiness, though he bestowed his attention on the walls, and his remarks on Cyril. As already stated, he was not chivalrous, and Jean was merely his sister. Without any particular partiality for Cyril, he appreciated Sir Cyril Devereux' social standing, and he liked a listener. After the fashion of most self-confident people,

entirely ignorant of art, he had a slap-dash opinion ready on all occasions, where art was under review.

"No. 56—'A Waterfall.' Frightful! Out of all proportion. No. 57—'A Highland Ferry.' Never saw such clouds: and I don't believe anybody else ever did either. No. 58—'A Portrait.' Might as well say whose! What a daub! Really—how they can admit such rubbish! No. 59—'Two Children.' Another daub! Ridiculous simper on that girl's face; and such dresses! No. 60—Ah, a military piece! Now, that's not bad!" complacently screwing up his eyes, and putting on the air of a gratified connoisseur.

"Not at all bad considering. Foremost figure very well placed—very well placed indeed. No. 61—'Pasturage.' Miserably drawn."

"Jean, look at the foreshortening of those carthorses! Masterly," murmured Cyril, with reference to the same.

The examination of every picture in the Academy takes time, but Oswald's method of proceeding consumed as little as was possible under the circumstances. He went on at a steady jog-trot, apportioning his minutes with impartial regularity, ten or twenty seconds to each painting, quite irrespective of its merits. He had to "do" the Exhibition, and he was bent on "doing" it thoroughly, on securing, in fact, the full worth of his shilling. He had paid to see the pictures; and see them he would.

As for opinions, he wanted none but his own. Why should he? Any adverse suggestion from Cyril was quashed at once; and Jean's ideas were met with supreme disdain. She knew far more of art than did Oswald; but neither he nor she would have admitted the fact; and Cyril, whose

cultivated taste was scandalised at every step, was far too wise to get up an argument with Oswald.

"What a bear it is!" he said to himself voicelessly once or twice; but he said little openly.

"No. 151—a lion! Ridiculous. Nobody ever saw a lion in that attitude, I'll be bound."

Conceivably, the artist had tried to produce an attitude from life; and Oswald's opportunities of observation had been limited to "the Zoo;" but second-class criticism jumps lightly over such small obstacles.

"No. 152—what's that? A long quotation. Some Eastern bosh or other. No. 153—worse still. A wretched symbolical affair. Mere clap-trap. No. 154—"

"O Oswald, wait a moment. Let me look. That colouring is grand. And the other—yes, I do like it. Don't you, Cyril—look—No. 153! It is wonderful!" Her artistic sense for once proving stronger than her subservience to Oswald. "So much underlying. And that woman's face—"

"Rubbish! Not worth a glance, I tell you. A mere farrago of notions, tossed together. No. 154—"

"Wait! Let her look in peace," interposed Cyril. "Your instinct is right, Jean. It is one of the best this season, not one that makes a great noise, but thought well of by good judges. But you won't get at the full beauty of conception without study."

"I could spend hours over that one face."

"Bosh!" repeated Oswald. "If one man says a picture is good, all the world runs mooning after him to say the same."

I've no patience with such humbug. Who ever saw anything like that in real life? The artist must be crazy. Why, I can't make head or tail of the thing—" with an accent on the pronoun which plainly implied—If I can't, who can?

"No. 155—Now, there's something like art, for you! 'In the Chimney-Corner.' No high-flown rubbish, but real everyday life. Just see how the firelight falls on the tongs. And the rug-pattern is perfect—why, it might have been photographed? And the old lady's cap ribbons—positively transparent. And the bunch of flowers on the table—why, you might pick them up. And here's another—No. 156—'Portrait of the Hon. Amelia Jenkinson'—every inch as good. The spots in her veil stand out as if they were genuine."

"Best Brussels net, at one-and-elevenpence-halfpenny per yard," muttered Cyril, stealing a glance full of mischief at Jean.

For one moment Jean's lips quivered a response; then she drew up her head, offended. In anybody else such self-complacent trifling would have aroused her scorn: but Oswald might say or do what he willed: and that Cyril should laugh at Oswald was intolerable. Jean looked severe; and Cyril assumed an air of apology, not nearly so abject as it would have been fifteen months earlier.

"The true test of painting! Of art!" declaimed Oswald, not listening to other people's remarks. "Must be true to life. Creatures in impossible attitudes, wearing impossible dresses, doing impossible things—that's not art, you know. It's bosh. Something true to life is the thing. Flowers you want to pick up! A curtain you try to pull aside! A veil you'd like to lift! That's art! . . . No. 157. Now, here's something worth looking at again. No symbolical clap-trap, but the real

thing. 'A landscape!' Now, these flowers on the bank—positively, one can count their leaves."

Their petals, he meant.

"Immense improvement on the old smudge and scratch style. Anything went down with people in those days. A blue patch stood for e sky, and a green blur did duty for a forest."

"I'm afraid a blue patch often does stand for the sky in London!" suggested Cyril, under his breath. "And a green blur does duty for a forest in my eyes—if the forest is far enough."

"Oswald does not mean that," promptly spoke up the devoted sister in his defence.

"Well—some question of distance is involved, certainly," admitted Cyril. "But if a forest, half-a-mile off, isn't a green blur, one can't on the other hand count its leaves. And a botanist can hardly count the stamens of a flower growing on a bank ten yards away."

"Not one person in a hundred knows a good picture when he sees it," declared Oswald. "Nature is the true test. What is true to Nature is true to Art. I'd sooner have a pair of tongs, with the firelight upon them, done well, than any number of fantastic things that mean, nobody knows what."

"I would have" settled the question, of course, permanently.

"Here she is!" Cyril's voice told of relief; and Jean found herself face to face with Evelyn.

That Evelyn should pass anywhere unnoticed was impossible: yet, as she came forward, she showed no

consciousness of the many eyes turned in her direction. Jean had received a good deal of attention in the crowd hitherto, appreciated by Cyril, though unnoticed by Oswald or herself; but Jean would win few glances in Evelyn's neighbourhood, young and fresh as she was by comparison. There was that about Evelyn which age could not do away with.

Yet time had told upon her, and more severely than it ought to have done. The pure delicacy of girlish bloom had vanished, leaving a pale skin, with only a faint patch of colouring on either cheek; and she was thinner than of old, too thin and worn for actual beauty. It is only in novels that girls of twenty-nine necessarily bid farewell to youth, and join the ranks of middle-age; but this young widow, close upon twenty-nine, attractive as she still was, might often have passed for thirty-five.

The violet eyes, with their dark fringes, were lovely yet, and would have embellished even a plain face, which Evelyn's face could never be; but the old restless craving in them had deepened, chasing away all girlish sparkle. She had still the look of one for ever dissatisfied with the present, for ever grasping after something unattainable; while the lips were alike more sad and more satirical than four years earlier. With all this, every gesture was so full of grace, every motion was so fascinating, that it was no wonder she should become, wherever she went, a centre of observation.

"Jean! At last!" she said, and her fingers closed round Jean's with a soft pressure which spoke volumes. "My dear, how you have altered; and yet how entirely you are the same!"

She had not seen Oswald for some four or five years, and did not recognise him. Oswald stood as if spellbound.

"My brother—" Jean said, and she put out her hand, smiling.

"Of course—I ought to have known. We are old friends."

Then she turned again to Jean, standing in the middle of the room, oblivious of the crowd around. "It does me good to see you again. I have had such a want lately—to be with you! Have you ever wanted me? Sometimes I think you are the main attraction to home."

"And you will settle down there now?" asked Jean, captivated anew, as she always had been captivated, by the grace of Evelyn's presence. She forgot even Oswald for the moment. "You will not want to go away again directly?"

"No, not at present. Not at all, permanently, I hope. Why should I? There is nothing to take me away. Dutton Park is my home for life, and they say the place looks neglected. I think—" in a hushed voice—"he would not like that. I must do what he would wish. It has come over me lately. O no, I shall settle down at home, and look after things. I have found a friend to be my companion—so far as anybody can be—" in the old weary tone. "And you will be near too! You—" with an affectionate glance—"and your good father. I wish I could have seen Madame Collier again."

"Aunt Marie wished it too. She left a message."

"Ah, she was always charming—so delightfully unconventional . . . How soon am I coming? I don't know. There is nothing to hinder or hasten my movements. I wish there were!" dropping her voice anew. "I am only too free —no ties or burdens, except the one burden of myself."

Then a faint smile: "You see I am the same Evelyn as of old, never content with what I have. If the ties existed, I should want to be rid of them. But you shall do me good, dear . . . What nice news this is about your cousin, Mr. James Trevelyan, and the Dutton living! I remember him, years ago, as very pleasant. And he has been in the East-End all this time!"

Then the pictures claimed renewed attention, under Oswald's patronage. He attached himself resolutely to Evelyn; and Jean fell behind with Cyril. Any other arrangement was hardly possible, since people cannot march, four abreast, through Academy crowds near the end of July: but to Jean it was a spoilt afternoon. She could see Oswald talking continuously to Evelyn; or, Evelyn listening with a courteous air; but she could not hear what was said. Cyril claimed continuous attention: and despite all Jean's efforts, he and she were left in the rear.

"Jean, I really wouldn't go in for all that—about painting," he remarked presently, hesitating for a word and leaving it to the imagination. "I wouldn't really. You know what I mean. Oswald's a capital fellow, of course; but everybody can't be artistic, and if it isn't in him, he's not to be blamed. Black spots on a lady's veil are all very well in a dressmaker's fashion-book, but that is not high art. And if an artist can't do more than make a coloured photo of grass and trees and human beings—Well, I admit that lots don't do more; but then they are not artists. They are only painters! They might just as well take to photography, and not bother their brains with an easel."

Jean was amazed. That Cyril should venture openly to attack Oswald's views to her was something unprecedented. She listened in bewildered silence.

"Don't you see, Jean? You understand."

"What more do you expect?" asked a constrained voice.

"As if you don't know! A great deal more. An artist has to get at the inner soul of things—the hidden meaning. Not merely to copy colours and shapes. A photo gives one single glimpse of a face—the impression of a moment—a grin, or a frown, or a simper, as the case may be. It can't do more. But an artist, painting that same face, ought to give you the man himself—the man as a whole. Not just one glimpse of a passing mood, but the essence of the character—a sort of resume of body and mind. Don't you see? An artist ought to be like a poet, able to dive deeper and rise higher than common men. You wouldn't think much of a poet who is always telling you that grass is green and the sky blue. Anybody can do as much, without poetic power. But half the modern painters don't tell us more, don't go deeper than the outside . . . I'm afraid Oswald would call all this 'bosh;' but, you know, you can't be in leading-strings to Oswald all your life. Oswald doesn't know everything; and you have brains enough to think for yourself."

Jean was still too much amazed to be able to analyse her own sensations. She said only, "Thanks."

"You don't like me to go against him in anything! Never mind! When you and I are married, you will learn to think as I do."

Jean did not blush.

It was Cyril who blushed; not Jean.

She only turned and faced him full, with calm wide-open eyes.

"When!!!" was all she said.

"Now what did make me say that?" Cyril demanded of himself, somewhat later. "Odd how things slip out! . . . After all, there's nobody like good old Jean! . . . If neither of us should come across anybody else in the next few years—Well, I really don't see why it shouldn't be! . . . Jean might take it as a joke—but—Anyhow, I am in no hurry."

CHAPTER IV.

THE PROCESS OF FORMATION.

"We alter day by day;
Each little moment, as life's current rolls,
Stamps some faint impress on our yielding souls;
 We may not rest nor stay,
Drifting on tides unseen to one dread goal and sure."

L.

MORRIS.

"WALK, Jean?" asked Mr. Trevelyan, putting his head into the Rectory dining-room, one early October afternoon. He was not given to the use of superfluous words.

Jean had been alone for an hour, busily working and busily thinking. She had a good deal to occupy her mind just then. Jem and his mother were expected at Dutton Rectory next day; and Evelyn and Miss Moggridge had arrived three nights earlier at the Park; and Cyril was at the Brow, and moreover was very perplexing.

Perhaps the last-named topic claimed the larger share of her attention, for Jean was provoked with Cyril. She could not forgive him the ridiculous speech he had made in the Academy. As a mere joke it was nothing, but Cyril had looked self-conscious ever since, and his looking so made her feel the same. Jean detested to feel self-conscious. Besides, the whole thing, was absurd. That she should ever marry Cyril—Cyril, with his dainty tastes and fanciful ways! —Impossible!

Cyril was unlike his real self—the real self she had known—and Jean, in popular phraseology, could not tell what to be at with him. What she called being unlike himself, was actually being like his present self, and only unlike his former self. He had so long been her slave, that she did not know what to think of herself or of him, under the new position of affairs. When she had seen him last, he had been a mere unformed lad, submissive to her lightest wish. She had laughed at his bondage, and had told him to think for himself; yet now that the bondage existed no more, she found that she had valued it.

For the young man had ceased to watch Jean with wistful devotion, as the lad had done. He had sprung into a different being. He was pleasantly conscious of his title, his

position, his age, his good looks, his gifts, his belongings; above all, of his Manhood. The manhood of twenty-one, though full of potentialities, since at that age, one can seldom guess where may lurk an embryo Shakespeare or an undeveloped Wellington, is such overpowering a matter to other people: but to the individual himself, it is often vast in possibilities.

One leading characteristic of early manhood is, not seldom, a disposition to worship womanhood—using the word "worship" in its conventionally poetic sense. But Jean did not represent Womanhood to Cyril. She was only Jean. He had run after her persistently from infantine days: he had always looked up to and leant upon Jean. Now he wanted somebody who should look up to and lean upon himself. And Jean was hopelessly capable of standing alone.

The idea of some day marrying Jean was an old idea, so familiar that it had slipped out, unexpectedly, at the Academy, surprising himself as much as Jean. Her reception of the speech had rather nettled Cyril: not so much at the moment as afterwards, when he recalled her look. He resolved no longer to trot meekly in her wake. It was time that Jean should learn who and what Sir Cyril Devereux of Ripley Brow really was.

As for marrying—there was plenty of time, and plenty of choice. Any number of nice girls might be glad to become Lady Devereux. Cyril was too modern a young man to be troubled by any morbid humility on the score of his own attractions. True, he did not much care for the ordinary run of "nice girls," since he prided himself on his fine discrimination of taste—whether exercised on sauces and stews, or on pictures and young ladies. But none the less, he was conscious of a wide field before him.

Jean was not ordinary, and therein lay her charm. Somebody else, whom he had come across, was also not ordinary, and therein lay Cyril's perplexity. For this somebody was by no means of so independent a temper as Jean. She had looked up to Cyril, had appealed to his judgment, had treated him in a pleasing manner as something superior to herself. Serious difficulties in that direction threatened to bar advances on the part of Cyril, beyond a certain point: but he was not disposed to deny himself present enjoyment, because of what might come after. The future could take care of itself.

Still, all his life he had been used to tell everything to Jean, and this habit of mind continued unchecked, even after fifteen months of separation. When at the Brow, he suffered from a haunting desire to wander incessantly towards the Rectory. Whether he would ever require Jean for his wife, he did not know. The only thing about which he felt absolutely sure, was that he did not wish Jean to marry anybody else.

The outcome of these ups and downs was a variableness of mood which exasperated Jean. It is a pity that we of modern days cannot go through life with the innocent simplicity of our great-grandfathers and great-grandmothers, who seem habitually to have滑 and glided into love, without the remotest suspicion beforehand of what was going to happen next. One can picture the surprise that it must have been for those dear old people—when they were young—one day to be in blissful unconsciousness of anything unusual; the next day to wake up and find themselves over head and ears in a world of new sensations. But even then they never dreamt of tearing their new-found love into little bits, to examine its component parts. They had not come to an introspective and analytic age.

Cyril could no more have walked unconsciously into love with Jean—or with the other girl—than he could have strolled unconsciously into the middle of his deepest pond. One half of himself was always watching the other half with a jealous eye. The minutest symptom of a change of state in either half had no chance of escaping observation. Whether he would rightly read the meaning of each symptom is a different question; for the power of self-gauging is in most people very limited; but at least it would be seen and commented upon.

Cyril had been at home a fortnight, and almost every day, on one pretext or another, he had made his appearance at the Rectory. When he came, he was vexed with himself for coming; and when he stayed away he was miserable. In fact, he very seldom did stay away. He only resolved each day to do so; and each morrow, he failed to carry out yesterday's resolution.

"If he would just be natural and sensible!" murmured the much-exercised Jean. "Or if he would amuse himself at home! . . . Does he haunt the Rectory because he thinks I wish it? He might know better! . . . Well, I shall not have much leisure for him now, with Evelyn and Jem and Cousin Chrissie! . . . After all, I believe it is only that he is a little spoilt. He will find his level by-and-by."

At this juncture, Mr. Trevelyan put his head into the room, and uttered his brief question—

"Walk, Jean?"

"Yes. Anywhere particular, father?"

To herself, Jean added, "So much the better! If he comes, he will find me out."

"Up the gorge. Cottages beyond the V-point. I can't take you in, for there's a case of diphtheria—where from, nobody can imagine. But you may wait for me on the bridge."

"I'll be ready in three minutes."

Strictly in three minutes they were off, through the garden and towards the river. They had a glimpse of the stepping-stones, standing up, solid and square; and Jean saw a little vision of a small white-faced boy, crouching thereon, with pitiful wails for help. Cyril was a great deal changed since those days! She had leisure for recollections, since Mr. Trevelyan never talked for talking's sake, but only spoke when he had something definite to say. He seemed to-day in a silent mood, yet Jean knew well that he liked to have her with him.

They struck away at a brisk pace up the path which led through the gorge. Golden-brown water flowed below; rocky banks rose sharply on either side; and a complex pattern was sketched upon the ground by sunlight through clustering leaves. Autumn colouring had begun to appear in sharp patches of red and yellow; dying tints, beautiful in death. Jean loved this slow fair fading of foliage in autumn, because of the silent promise embedded therein of winter's quiet sleep, to be followed by spring's Resurrection.

"It is delicious here," she said, as she pressed upward with a light step; and not till they had gone some distance, did she note a movement of her father's—the taking out of his pocket-handkerchief to wipe his face. Jean looked at him in surprise. They were wont to pelt at full speed up this gorge, without "turning a hair," either of them.

"Why, father—are we going too fast?"

"No," rather breathlessly, and as if ashamed. "It is nothing. Warm day."

"I thought the weather perfect." Jean seldom thought it aught else. Sunshine and frost, storm and calm, came alike to her.

She would have slackened speed, but Mr. Trevelyan pressed forward, as if bent on proving to Jean how entirely he was his usual self. The attempt was hardly successful. Reaching the bridge, he came to a pause, leant against the wooden parapet, and actually gasped for breath.

"I don't think you ought to do so much," Jean remarked, mindful of her aunt's parting injunction. She knew better than to show any marked concern, but it was impossible to avoid seeing his condition. For some seconds, he was unable to speak: his eyes had grown dim; a livid paleness overspread his face; and when he again swept away the streaming damp, large drops started anew on his brow.

"It's all right," he said at length, breathing hard. "Nothing of consequence. I am a little out of condition, perhaps. Now I must leave you here."

"May I not come with you? I am not afraid of infection."

"If it were your duty to go, I would say nothing; but it is not. No; take a stroll for fifteen minutes, if you like, and then wait within sight of the bridge. I may be twenty minutes or half-an-hour. Barclay's cottage is only five minutes beyond the others."

"Must you see him to-day?"

"As well go, when I am so near. He was rude last time I called, so the more need that I should call again soon. A

strange man—but the poor fellow has had everything in life to harden and embitter him—nothing softening or humanising."

"Then is it his fault that he is what he is?"

Mr. Trevelyan went off at his usual pace, unheeding the words: and Jean crossed the bridge into the path beyond, which led towards the Brow plantations. She was busied with the question she had asked, and with this difficult now parishioner, whom she had not yet so much as seen.

He was, as Mr. Trevelyan said, a strange being; gloomy and repellent; a man who had tasted the dregs of sin and humiliation. After years of penal servitude, followed by the semi-freedom of a ticket-of-leave existence, he was now at liberty to make a fresh start. But he was soured, and friendless. The present had for him no happiness, the future no hope. He seemed to have come to Dulveriford chiefly because he knew nobody there: and the one thing he demanded was to be left alone. He had no doubt something, however little, to live on, since he made no effort to find work. His was a solitary existence. He exchanged amenities with none; rarely entered the village except after dark; and haunted lonely lanes, to the terror of cottage children. Kind words won no response; and kindness in action was spurned. He had lost or flung away all faith in God and in man: and thus far Mr. Trevelyan had failed to make any impression on him.

Jean knew all this, and Mr. Trevelyan's involuntary utterance was a further revelation.

Everything in life against the man! Everything hardening; everything embittering; nothing softening; nothing humanising. Then, how far could he help being what he had

become? How far was Barclay responsible? Might he have emerged from such surroundings aught else than the miserable and guilty being that he was? Surely, yes—had he the will to emerge! But could the crippled and stunted will so assert itself? There lay the real core of the problem, rather felt than expressed by Jean. Suppose Barclay to have chosen his own line of life; then he would be responsible for the outcome of that choice. Suppose him to have had no power of choice; then he would only be responsible for the use he had made of surroundings from which he could not escape. Jean saw distinctly the two positions.

"And oh; it is puzzling," she sighed, bending to look at a delicate cobweb, with its silken spokes and parallels, scattered drops of sticky fluid, and spotted crouching owner, all moored by a long elastic cable to a bough overhead.

"The life of lower animals seems so much simpler. They only have to do this or that, without freedom of choice . . . Yet how little we can tell! Even they may have more freedom than we know: and the higher they rise, the more they must decide for themselves . . . A dog can choose whether to obey or disobey; and Prince has a conscience for right or wrong. But then again comes in the question of training. What a different animal Prince would be, if he had run wild in the streets all his life! And he could not have helped the difference."

Precisely at the fifteen minutes' end, she reached the Bridge, and stood there waiting.

It was a pleasant place to wait in, and Jean was in no haste. Like most natures of a finely-strung and intellectual type, hers included a strong love of solitude, and great enjoyment of a tête-à-tête with Nature. The most intimate friend standing by must in some degree detract from this peculiar

happiness. Perfectly to enter into Nature's moods, to hear Nature's voices, to be swayed by Nature's influences, one must be absolutely alone with Nature—that is to say, with Nature inanimate and animate, excluding only man.

Nature's mood that day was calm. Just above the rustic bridge the river-bed narrowed, rocks rising perpendicularly on either side; and the golden water flowed between in a steadfast shoot, slanting downward through a fluted channel, which had been polished by the continual rush into smoothness. Near the base of this channel, the swift watery shoot impinged on a projecting rock—of harder texture than surrounding rocks, therefore more slowly worn away—and glanced aside in a continuous rebound, a broad sheet of water, yellow-brown and translucent, curving gracefully from left to right, the edges of the curved sheet being folded as a sheet of iron might have been folded. All this was a temporary arrangement between rock and water; for each drop of water that swept against or over the rock helped to fret away the solid substance; and each passing year would witness further changes in the river-bed.

It is always so in life. Everything tells upon everything else—everybody upon everybody else—by the mere force of impact: and nothing can stand still in a lasting changelessness.

How long the waters had been carving for themselves this fluted rock-channel, who may venture to say? No doubt in past ages, the stream had poured over opposing boulders, making a waterfall beyond: and what was then a waterfall had been since transformed into a swift shoot. Inanimate Nature is very thorough in her mode of work; never getting into a flurry, never stamping aught that she undertakes, but steadily persistent through centuries.

Trees grew around; oak mingling with birch and sycamore with beech, in a very labyrinth of foliage. Creeping ivy had embraced whole trunks, and flung itself from bough to bough. Abundant bracken crowded the banks, turning fast to brown and gold, more fair in its dying than in its fuller life. Mosses and lichens dressed the grey stones with borrowed beauty. Not a breath of air stirred, and not a leaf moved, except where one loose birch-bough near the stream swayed to and fro, swung by the breath of the rushing water. No wonder the rush was strong; for the whole river had to gather itself together and pour through this slender sluice, in the same time that it would loiter below through a bed of unlimited width capabilities. Lack of space had to be balanced by excess of speed.

Jean leant on the parapet, to gaze and listen. She gathered first the broad utterance of the stream, a continuous sound, busy and loud, not unlike the murmur of a town. Then she separated the whole utterance into its many voices, as a trained ear can separate the instruments of an orchestra, listening first to flute, then to violin, and then to 'cello. Jean could hear the little inner whispers, the low gurgles and mutters, of tiny watery whirls and waves, together with the swish of runlets checked by opposing boulders: all of which voices mingled together into one chorus.

A heavy step drawing near brought Jean to an upright position; and at once she was face to face with a gaunt man, tall though slouching, dark-browed and sullen. Jean did not like his look. In a general way, she thought nothing of meeting a stranger in a lonely spot; and personal fear had been hitherto a sensation almost unknown to her. But at the sight of this man, strange to say, fear sprang into existence. She became aware of her unprotected position.

"Good-evening," she said, as he came nearer.

It was the country custom at Dulveriford for everybody to greet everybody in passing; and Jean thought it best to speak, showing no alarm. She moved to leave the bridge, purposing to walk on and meet her father; but this plan was frustrated. The man placed himself at the entrance of the bridge, barring exit on that side.

Should she retreat to the other side? It would look like flight; and the man might follow. To escape along the long path which led towards the Brow plantation, with such a pursuer, seemed worse than to stay where she was. Moreover, she would then be out of Mr. Trevelyan's reach; and here, at any moment, he might appear.

CHAPTER V.

PROTECTOR AND PROTECTED.

"You can't do some things with impunity."
"The Ring and the Book."

THESE thoughts flashed through Jean's mind, as she stood resolutely still, trying to be unconscious of the sense of dread which drove all colour from her face. It was a

sensation no less unpleasant than new. Up to this date, Jean could almost have said with the infant Nelson, "What is fear? I never saw it." Something of danger she had known; and she knew what it was to meet danger with an undaunted spirit: but actual womanly terror had not assailed her.

She might have met a dozen men in the loneliest lanes of Dulveriford, one after another, and have cared little for it; greeting each in succession with a pleasant word. But this man—! Jean could not tell what it was about him which frightened her. She was only, all at once, conscious of her own girlish helplessness, as she never had been before.

Still, whatever Jean felt, she would not be soon overcome. As he stood and stared, she said, "Will you let me pass, if you please?"

He half moved as if to comply; then, changing his mind, he grasped either parapet of the narrow bridge with a large hand.

"Perhaps you have something that you wish to say to me. What is it?" asked Jean.

The very effort to seem brave made her inwardly braver.

No answer came.

"Do you want anything?" she repeated. "Are you in trouble?" as the stolid misery of the dark face grew upon her.

"In—trouble!" The words dropped slowly, and a guttural laugh followed. "I like that!—I do!"

"Is your name Barclay?"

"Yer've hit it! My name's Barclay."

He mounted on the wooden bridge, a good step higher than the path on which he had stood; and all Jean's strength of nerve was required to keep her from flight; but she was convinced that her wisest plan was to show no alarm.

"Now yer mind! I've sommat to say to yer—if so be yer the Parson's darter."

Evidently he knew Jean by sight, though she had not known him.

"Mr. Trevelyan is my father."

"Then yer'll tell the Parson as how I don't want none of he! Nor none of his talk! Nor none of his preaching! Nor none of his religion!"

The man spoke with a dogged fierceness, bordering on insolence.

Jean stood perfectly still, her head high, as she answered
—"Yes."

"Yer can tell him! I'll have nought of he! Had enough o' parsons, and don't want no more. If he'll let me be, I'll let he be. And if so be he comes a-meddling, it'll be the wuss for he! Yer mind! I ain't a-going to stand it!" He stepped forward, and shook a wrathful fist within a yard of Jean's face; yet still she would not quail. "Yer understand? I ain't a-going to stand it!" And an oath followed.

"Hush! You are not to speak so to me," said Jean slowly. "I will tell my father what you say. You are at liberty to send a message; but there is no need to be angry."

Barclay's clenched hand dropped. Something in the still face of the girl calmed the wild animal which was uppermost in him. She had marvellous self-control; for no one looking on could have guessed her terror.

"Look 'ere!" He spoke in accents a trifle more subdued. "I means what I says! I don't mean no harm to nobody so as I'm let alone. But I won't be meddled with. Nor I won't be preached at."

"I will give your message, and my father will do what he thinks right. If you have no more to say, will you please let me pass?"

"No: I ain't done yet." A darker expression rolled over his face, and he scowled at Jean. "I ain't done yet. Look 'ere! Yer don't think it, but I means what I says. If you parson comes along a-meddling, it'll be the wuss for he! Tell yer—! I'd heave him over them rocks, as easy—!"

Jean's breath grew quick, and righteous wrath flushed the young face. "Do you know what you are saying?" she broke in. "Do you know that you are threatening murder? And for what? Because my father is kind and good, and will not leave off trying to help you." She grew very white, speaking with passionate earnestness. "I know—I understand—you have lived a miserable life! And when my father would bring you, if he could, a little hope—then you talk of throwing him over the rocks. Is that worthy of a man? At least you could meet kindness by kindness. What do you suppose my father gains by going after you? Nothing!"

"He be the Parson! 'Tis his trade! He be paid for it!"—sullenly.

"Paid for it! What do you call being paid for it? He has a small income, and he is expected to see to the Church and

the Parish. Do you suppose he gets a penny more by going to see you! If he never went near your cottage again, nobody would call him to account. He goes because he thinks it right—not because of anything he can gain by it. He goes because he wants you to be happy."

Barclay seemed with an effort to shake himself free from the effect of her words. "Tell yer—! It's no good! Don't want to be helped. Yer don't know," flinging out once more a clenched hand towards Jean, and holding it extended. "Tell yer—! I'll have nought to do with Parsons. Never no more! Don't believe in 'em! Nor don't believe in Church! Nor don't believe in nothin'. Tell yer! I means to be let alone!"

Cyril's voice rang out indignantly at this juncture: "Jean! You here!"

In a moment he was on the bridge, past Barclay, whom he twisted half round in his passage, and beside Jean; his eyes flashing; his whole figure alert for action.

Jean saw so much; saw the brawny arm struck down; and heard a sharp interchange of angry words, culminating in a contemptuous "Be off!" from Cyril.

Then the man was gone; and reaction from resolute courage had rendered her almost unable to stand. But the relief of Cyril's presence—! Jean had laughed often at his boyishness, congratulating herself on her own independent spirit. She learnt this day that the bravest woman living cannot always do without a man to protect her.

"What was it all about?" asked Cyril, when he had guided Jean to a mossy lump of rock, and had made her sit down.

"What did the fellow do to you? No, don't answer yet—" as an effort to reply brought back the convulsive tremor in her throat. "Keep quiet a minute. The wretch!—What a good thing I came! They told me at the Rectory that you were gone up the Gorge. I say, I'll get some water. I've got my little travelling-cup here, in my pocket. It won't take me three minutes to climb down—and you're regularly shaken."

"Don't go—please. He might come back."

This from Jean! Cyril could hardly believe his own ears. For the first time within the recollection of both, he was the protector, Jean the protected. Reversal of the childish order of things had been long in coming; but here it was; and Cyril had difficulty in hiding his gratification.

"The fellow won't come back. He knows better. Now tell me all about it—" with an authority which at any other time would have made Jean laugh or resist. She obeyed now, meekly as ever Cyril had submitted himself to her, and gave particulars.

"You were about as plucky as any girl could be," decided Cyril. "But I say, Jean, you ought to take warning. It's not right for you to be wandering about in all sorts of wild places alone. I wonder Mr. Trevelyan doesn't see. You ought to take more care, really."

"I hope my father will not meet Barclay. You are sure he went down the Gorge—not up? Oh, I am all right again—" in answer to renewed inquiries. "I can't think why I was so stupid. Do you really not mind waiting a few minutes? My father is sure to come directly."

"As if I could leave you for the chance of another fright!" Cyril seated himself on the rock beside Jean, and chatted on

matters indifferent, winning her thoughts from the past scene.

He had not been so like his old self for a good while; though it was an old self with new elements intermixed. Presently a break occurred: and as Jean was about to recur to Mr. Trevelyan's long absence, he dashed into a new subject.

"Jean—there is something I want to ask of you!"

"Yes. What?"

"I want you to be kind to some friends of mine, coming to live in Dulveriford."

"What name?"

"Captain and Mrs. Lucas. Nephew of old Lady Lucas, and . . . Then you have heard—?"

"Not much. But, Cyril—! Friends of yours!"

"Why not?"

"I should have thought—Some one told me nobody would call upon them. Lady Lucas least of all."

"I didn't think you stooped to run with the tide."

"Of course, my father as a clergyman would do anything he could. But if they are not in our Parish—"

"Then you'll wrap yourself in your superior virtue, and hold aloof, like the rest of the world?"

Jean was puzzled at the mortified feeling in his tone.

"I can't understand. How came they to be your friends? Don't think me hard upon them, please, because I can only know what I have been told . . . Miss Devereux will not call."

"You don't suppose I am going to be in leading-strings to aunt Sybella all my life."

"No—only—Where did you come across them first?"

"Last autumn, in Switzerland. Captain Lucas and I met first on a mountain-top—overtaken by the same storm; and we took refuge in the same hut. After that we saw a lot of one another. I had walks with him and his daughter—and I used to go in for afternoon tea. Aunt Sybella was seedy, with any amount of coddling on hand; so I pleased myself."

"Did she and they meet?"

"Oh, she didn't come across them. They were in lodgings—not at our hotel. He's a well-read man—very good manners—and then one's so awfully sorry for him. She's about the nicest woman I know—Mrs. Lucas, I mean. And they are fighting one of the hardest battles a man ever had to fight—that's to say he is; and she helps him . . . You good people are all so exclusive, that you won't put out a helping hand. You only draw your saintly skirts aside, for fear of contamination, and walk by on the other side. If ever a man fell among thieves, Captain Lucas has. And if ever a man needed kind friends—I suppose he would get enough of pity and help too, if he were a working man, struggling to be sober. Being unfortunately a gentleman by birth, he only has the cold shoulder all round."

Jean listened in bewildered silence to this rush of words. A new phase of Cyril had appeared. She could not divine all

the hidden springs which moved him; but strong feeling on behalf of another was sure to rouse her interest.

"I should like to understand more," she said. "What I heard was that Lady Lucas' nephew was a confirmed drunkard—dismissed from the army for hard drinking. Don't mind my saying it, please: because I was told."

"There's truth in the tale. He has a desperate tendency that way. It's awfully rough on him. His father died of delirium tremens; and the bent has come down to Captain Lucas. A horrible thing to have inherited! Then there was his bringing up, all through boyhood his father was a victim to drink, and the boy tempted every way. His mother was a good woman, but I don't think she counted for much in the household. Then he was put into the army; and you know what that means. He couldn't stand against it."

"And then—?"

"He had warning after warning; and it ended in his being dismissed. That sobered him; and about the same time, his mother died, making him promise to take a fresh start. Ever since, for years, he has kept up the struggle . . . I don't suppose you or I can fancy what it is—the sort of craving that seizes on him at times. Once in a way, he is overcome; and then he despairs; yet still he fights on. He never goes out to dinner—or anywhere, if a bottle of wine might be on the table; for he daren't trust himself."

"I wonder any one could marry him."

"She had known him all her life. It was a few years after he left the army—and she knew how determined he was to conquer. She thought she could help him; and I am sure she does. He told me himself that in some of his fits of despair, he never could have got up again, but for her.

There's nobody else. None of his relations will have a word to say to him—they are such very good people, Jean—"

"You needn't sneer!"

"But it's true! And all her friends have cast her off for marrying him."

"I really can't think how she could. Was it right?"

"I suppose she thought it was: and she had to settle the question for herself. It's not a common case, you know—not like a man mastered by the habit. And the question is now, when he is so different, ought every one to go on punishing him for what he was once? I don't say he will never be overcome again. He may—some day. It's a frightfully hard battle—nobody knows how hard. But what more can he do than he is doing? He has kept straight now for over a year; and I do believe he will conquer in the end. I can't see that he ought to be treated like pariah by all good people. Wouldn't real goodness mean doing all one could to help him? . . . I'm not sneering at religion, Jean!—Only at the sort of sham goodness that—You know what I mean!"

"If one could help him really—"

"Of course one can. Nobody has any business to ask him to dinner, if wine is on table. If he knew, he wouldn't go! They don't have it in their house; and Em—I mean, Miss Lucas—has never tasted anything stronger than water. There's nothing for them but that plan: with his tendencies. He can't be moderate; so he must give up altogether . . . Still, I do think a few friends might call sometimes, and be kind to them, and make a little change for the poor girl; and ask them to afternoon tea. Or even for once, if it wasn't too desperate a self-denial, manage not to have wine on table."

"If my father is willing, I shall be glad enough to call. When do they come?"

"Soon. In a week or two. That queer little red house near the Post-Office belongs to Captain Lucas. He has lost money lately, so they are glad to live there rent-free."

"What is Miss Lucas like?"

"Oh, rather pretty," with would-be indifference. "You'd never guess what a dull life hers has been. I say, Mr. Trevelyan is unconscionably long. We'd better go to meet him. You must keep clear of the cottages; but I can't leave you alone here."

Jean yielded after some hesitation, and they had not far to walk. One turn brought them within view of a figure lounging on the ground, resting against the smooth bole of a large beech.

"Father!" exclaimed Jean. "Why, he has fainted!"

Mr. Trevelyan had never in his life been more ashamed of himself. That he should faint, like any hysterical school-girl, was too ridiculous.

Cyril privately doubted whether the attack were a genuine swoon; but he wisely said nothing.

When with much trouble they had brought Mr. Trevelyan round, the latter refused to be counted an invalid. As for needing help in the walk down the gorge—Cyril might look to Jean! And Mr. Trevelyan strode off at his most vigorous pace. This could not last, however. Cyril's tough young arm

was soon needed, if the Rector wished to get home that night.

Once safe in his study, Mr. Trevelyan rallied, and laughed at Cyril's proposal to send for Dr. Ingram.

"Nothing was wrong," he said. "Merely a touch of over-fatigue. A good night would set him to rights."

He had been to Barclay's cottage, had found him out, and had met him immediately afterwards.

"A rather disagreeable interview," Mr. Trevelyan admitted. "The man was abusive. I told him I should follow my conscience as to calling again, whether or no he wished to see me."

Jean's adventure was then related; and Cyril ventured to recommend greater care.

"Jean ought not to go about alone in such places, now she was a young lady."

Mr. Trevelyan's eyes twinkled, and Jean's quick ears caught the sound of a faint mutter, not unlike "teaching your grandmother!" Then he thanked Cyril politely for the hint; since whatever else Mr. Trevelyan might be, he was always a gentleman. "Jean must exercise discretion," he said. "I can't supply a groom to walk in her rear. Barclay probably meant no harm. He is a sulky bear; but I must do my duty."

"He will consider that he has given you fair warning."

"Of his intention to toss me over the rocks? Two are needed for that little game. Possibly I might fail to consent. However, I am much obliged to you for your care of Jean—"

holding out his hand with a grasp which almost made up for the preceding irony.

"You don't think the best plan would be to leave the man alone for a while, till he wants you?"

"Least trouble for myself, no doubt. Not most hopeful for him. His has been a dark story; and he shall have one more chance—if I can give it to him." Mr. Trevelyan's penetrating eyes looked into Cyril's, and the stern lips softened unwontedly to ask, "If Christ were here, would He leave that poor fellow to go down hopelessly—without an effort to pull him up?"

"Then you will agree with me!" Cyril exclaimed, and forthwith, he poured out the story of the Lucases.

"Yes: you are right," Mr. Trevelyan said, at the first break. "I agree with you. As brother Christians, and brother Churchmen, we may not 'walk by on the other side.'"

"And you will call?"

"I will do all in my power—and Jean will do all in hers. They will be in Jem's Parish; and you should go to him. But," after a moment's thought, "don't be too ready to condemn those who take a different view. There may be difficulties involved, not apparent to you. If I had boys growing up, I should count it a serious matter to throw them under his influence. Now I must have half-an-hour's rest, before getting to work. So good-bye for the present—" once more holding out his hand.

"Jean, I don't know how it is, but there is something about your father unlike other people," said Cyril, in the passage. "He doesn't go in for a lot of religious talk; but when he does say something, it goes straight to the mark. One can't help knowing how he feels it! He's so real!"

"I'm glad you understand him," Jean answered.

CHAPTER VI.

"NOT IN MY SET."

"And oh, for ane-and-twenty, Tam!
And hey, sweet ane-and-twenty, Tam!"

R. BURNS.

SYBELLA DEVEREUX, with a dinner-party hanging over her head, was a sight to see.

Dinner-parties at the Brow were not altogether unusual; and the servants knew what they were about; and Sybella was able to afford what she considered necessary, without reaching the end of her tether; but, none the less, she always lived through any amount of previous agonies, and invariably expected everything to go wrong.

Any dinner-party was bad enough; even if it were a concoction of her own devising, and after her own taste. Dear Lady Lucas, for example, as the central dish—if in these days one may talk, even symbolically, of "central dishes;" and that good Colonel Atherstone and his sister for side dishes; and the delightful new St. John's curate, Mr. Byng, whom report wrongfully declared to have been selected by Sybella herself for Mr. Kennedy; and of course dear Mr. Kennedy himself, not to mention that less desirable appendage, his wife—all these and any other members of the St. John's "set," as Evelyn had once incautiously termed them, to her husband's displeasure, Sybella was charmed to entertain. Any amount of previous agonies was worth enduring for such a consummation.

If, however, dinner-parties weighed upon Sybella's shoulders, when she had the devising of them, how much more would they weigh when their management was taken out of her hands, and when the traditions of her youth were liable to cruel outrage!

Cyril was not now only of age, but fully aware of the fact, and of all that it implied. He was his own master; and Sybella, his quondam guardian, could no longer exert authority over him; but this, she was slow to realise. His twenty-first birthday in August had been duly observed; and Sir Cyril had comported himself towards friends and neighbours, not only with what Sybella, called his "sweetly aristocratic" politeness, but also with the air unmistakable of master of the domain. Which of course he was! Ripley Brow belonged to Cyril—not to Sybella. Sybella's tenure of office was at an end; and if she remained at Ripley Brow, she remained by Cyril's permission. She had no grain of right to stay otherwise; and since she possessed her own independent income, sufficient to keep her in comfort, many doubted whether the permission would be long

accorded. Sybella's worrying ways were pretty well known in the neighbourhood.

To Sybella herself, the idea had not so much as occurred that a change might be contemplated by her nephew. If Cyril were master—and that he meant to be master soon became evident—Sybella was mistress; and mistress she intended to remain. Ripley Brow had always been her home, therefore of course it always would be. No unusual style of argument, this, with more vigorous intellects than Sybella's.

Nay, for a while, Sybella had not even expected Cyril to exercise his rights as master. He was so young still; and she, for eleven years, had had the irresponsible control of everything; and any sudden alteration was most unlikely. Legally, she might not be any longer his guardian; but she was his aunt, and he was her nephew; and Sybella never believed in young people growing up; and she counted his moral indebtedness to herself as enormous in amount. Altogether there was no reason why everything might not go on exactly the same ad infinitum. A remote possibility did, no doubt, exist that Cyril might some day in the course of years desire to marry; but at present, he was too ridiculously young. Sybella did not intend to allow it.

She was unutterably taken by surprise—"struck on a heap," to use a familiar expression—when Cyril one day brought her a written list of names, and expressed his intention to have the said people invited to dinner on a certain evening.

Sybella read the names aloud, with intervening ejaculations.

"Lady Lucas, and the Trevelyanys! Impossible, Cyril! I never ask them together. Lady Lucas does not approve of Mr. Trevelyan's Church views. Mr. James Trevelyan and his mother! No, I do not see the least need to begin having

them! They are not at all in my set; and Colonel Atherstone says he is really a most dangerous young man! Evelyn and Miss Moggridge! That dreadful Miss Moggridge! One never knows what she will do next. I detest masculine women. Mr. Cuthbert! No, I don't like Mr. Cuthbert at all. He has such a sneering way of saying things. Mr. Byng—"

Sybella laid down the paper, and said it would not do. It was quite out of the question. She was willing to have a dinner-party, if Cyril liked—though really she was so tired with all that had to be done—she would have preferred to wait a few weeks—but at all events, it could not be that dinner-party. The people would not suit one another at all. It would be most unpleasant.

"You know, one has to be so very particular who one asks to meet who," she went on plaintively and ungrammatically. "Anything of clashing is so extremely disagreeable. And besides—"

"Well, perhaps they would not quite suit," admitted Cyril.

He sat down, facing Miss Devereux with a perverse smile, which ought to have warned her of quicksands near.

"I put in Lady Lucas and Mr. Byng solely for your sake, and if you don't mind we'll leave them out. The rest are all right. Ten isn't a bad number. Besides, we might get Dr. Ingram and his daughter, if two more are needed. He's always an acquisition."

"Dr. Ingram! Cousin of all the Trevelyanys! Worse and worse!"

"They'll pair off well enough," continued the reckless young baronet, oblivious of the reddening rims round Sybella's eyes. "What—you would rather keep the list as it is—not

strike out Lady Lucas? You didn't read Admiral Grice's name?—Look—at the top. He'll take you in, of course; and I thought you would like that, to escape Mr. Trevelyan. He's a jolly old fellow, and there's nothing he likes better than discussing his gout, so you and he will get on famously. I must undertake Lady Lucas, and if only we stumble on everybody's relationships, it's smooth sailing for an hour. The old lady is sure to be serene, retailing her decent from Japhet. It will be almost a family dinner-party, and the talk is likely to become general. That's what—Eh?"

Sybella gasped incoherently.

"That's what I want. Aunt, mind you don't put an enormous block of greens on the table, so that nobody can see anybody. Just streak things about on the table-cloth somehow. Evelyn will give you a hint. Then I've bracketed Mr. Trevelyan with Mrs. Trevelyan, and Cuthbert with Evelyn. I suppose Jem Trevelyan really ought to have Evelyn, in virtue of his new dignities; but he is the last fellow to mind, and I want to see him get a rise out of Miss Moggridge. It's famous when she flips her bread into little bits, and whisks her table-napkin off her knees, in defence of women's rights. And Mr. Byng is left to Jean. He will chatter nineteen to the dozen, and Jean will look like a martyr. But—" hopefully—"if you wouldn't mind dropping out those two, it's easy enough to rearrange. I'll take Mrs. Trevelyan, and—"

"So very uncomfortable!" sobbed Sybella, feeling herself dethroned; and much as she disliked the troubles and responsibilities of office, she by no means disliked its dignities.

"Uncomfortable! I don't see why! Really I don't understand what you have to cry about. You can't surely expect me

never to ask my friends to The Brow. That would be rather hard lines!"

Sybella wept lugubriously.

"Don't you see? I've waited till now, but people will expect a difference. I'm glad enough that you should have your cronies as often as you like—any number of them—why, I've thrown a couple in, purely on your account. Only I must have my turn."

"To ask Mr. Trevelyan to dinner! And after all these years! Never once since my dear aunt—! And with his views!" wailed Sybella.

"And I don't see how one's to ask him without his views!" murmured Cyril. Then aloud, "That's the very thing! I would have asked him to dinner hundreds of times, but I knew you wouldn't consent so long as you had the responsibility, you know. So I just had to wait . . . It's no good discussing his views with you, because you go by what Colonel Atherstone says, while I know the man himself. If you really knew Mr. Trevelyan, you couldn't help feeling differently . . . As for Jem Trevelyan, the more we can see of him, the better. He's a first-rate fellow—every way! . . . But I don't want to bother you—" in a tone of relenting which brought one gleam of hope to Sybella's breast. "If you dislike the thing so much, and would rather make some other arrangement for yourself for that evening, it is quite easy. Evelyn would come and head my table. There's no real difficulty."

"My table" settled the matter.

Sybella beat a retreat to her own room, but opposition ceased. The last shot had told. To abdicate in favour of Evelyn, for even one night, was no part of Sybella's policy.

Cyril had made up his mind to strike, once and for all, for liberty. A wiser woman than Sybella would have foreseen this, and by judicious yielding would have obviated the need for any such self-assertion on Cyril's part. Had she at once yielded the reins to him, he would probably have put them back into her hands. But striving to retain too much, she was in danger of losing everything.

Sybella, unfortunately, was not wise. She gave in because she had no choice; but for days she sulked; and Cyril's kind-mannered overtures, designed to show that he had no wish to give pain, met with a snappish response.

Little as Sybella knew it, she was slowly killing her last remnants of power over Cyril. A gentle and loving woman might have guided him with a rein of silk, might have done with him almost what she would. His affectionateness could have been worked upon to any extent. But unauthorised attempts at control roused all his latent powers of resistance; and ill-temper on her side deadened feeling on his. Nothing is so deadening to affection as the constant friction of an uncertain and irritable temper. Cyril had once been really fond of Miss Devereux; but through years, the fondness had been lessening under the chill of her uncontrolled egotism, and this autumn's struggles bid fair to put it out of existence altogether.

As the dinner-party drew near, Sybella had to put aside irritation so far as to prepare for it. She found that, if she did not exert herself, arrangements would be taken out of her hands. Thereupon she consented to listen, with an injured air, to what Cyril had to say, and she gave requisite orders.

One thing tending to smooth her ruffled feelings was Cyril's interest in the new dress with which he insisted on

presenting her. She had plenty of dresses already; but no doubt he meant the gift for a peace-offering.

A difficulty arose. Cyril wanted Miss Devereux to have a handsome black silk or satin; and Sybella desired pale mauve, trimmed with white lace. Cyril suggested grey as a compromise; but Sybella held to the mauve. She had worn a delicate straw-coloured silk on Cyril's birthday, and Lady Lucas had congratulated her on her youthful looks. Lady Lucas was famed for saying smooth things, and to other people, it had seemed that the too light dress and too juvenile hat had brought out the deepening ripples in Sybella's cheeks, and had shown off the ridges in her throat. But these remarks had not reached Sybella.

After all, she was only just over fifty; and what is fifty compared with—say, with eighty? Sybella felt young still; and she probably would feel the same, if she should live to be ninety; not because she kept youth's elasticity, which does occasionally last into old age, but because she was a creature of one-sided development, and part of her brain had never fully emerged from the semi-infantine stage. Hence her tendency to gush.

Cyril, at twenty-one, naturally looked upon fifty as somewhat advanced; and, theories of age apart, he was keen enough to see that "Aunt Sybella" looked far better in middle-aged grey or black than in pale straw: or in mauve as delicate as the blue of "love-in-a-mist." However, not wishing to give fresh offence, he bought the coveted hazy hue; and Sybella, in consultations with her dressmaker, became almost reconciled to the thought of "that dreadful dinner-party."

All the invitations were accepted, including Jem's. He knew that he would meet Evelyn, and might probably have to take her in to dinner. What then? All "that" was over—a thing of the past. Evelyn Villiers was merely a pleasant acquaintance to him now, and a rather frequent member of his congregation. She seemed to be gradually sliding away from St. John's, and slipping into the Parish Church. Mr. James Trevelyan "helped her," she said quietly, and her husband had liked him. But Jem knew well that they could never be anything further, one to the other.

He did not even think that he wished for anything further in their intercourse. Once, undoubtedly, he had wished it. Whether he had ever been genuinely in love with her, he was not now quite sure. She had been to him as a "bright particular" distant star; as an ethereal unearthly being; as a lovely dream; as "an angel," in short. So he had once told Jean, and it was true. But Jem was older now, and Evelyn was not exactly an angel.

They had exchanged calls. Evelyn had found Mrs. Trevelyan out, and Jem and his mother had found Evelyn in. She had been rubbed the wrong way by a prolonged call, and a lengthy dissertation on the evils of the age, from Colonel Atherstone. Evelyn always bore with him for her husband's sake; but he left her used up and flat, even petulant in a gentle fashion. She vented her petulance once or twice on the unoffending Miss Moggridge; and though Miss Moggridge always seemed to enjoy whatever Evelyn did, the faintest sign of ill-temper in his "angel" was a shock to Jem. He did not expect women in general to be entirely above all human weakness; he was not so unreasonable. But Evelyn was different!

Her violet eyes had their old pathetic unrest; only, perhaps, such unrest is more pathetic at twenty-five than at twenty-

nine, especially when the twenty-nine looks like thirty-five; and then craving for something unattainable had grown into what was more like discontent. Nothing can ever be less attractive than discontent.

Moreover, Jem was in a measure preoccupied. He had a great deal of work, worry, and responsibility, all pressing on him. So though he had come to Dutton with some secret dread lest the old pain might revive, it had as yet shown no symptoms of such a resuscitation.

In his East-End Parish, Jem had been judging by that somewhat doubtful test, success—the right man in the right place. He had exactly suited his work, and his work had exactly suited him.

Perhaps that was why he could not be suffered to remain there indefinitely. Friction is often a necessity for the polishing of character.

Jem was likely to have friction enough in Sutton.

His first sermon, after reading himself in, had been preached some three or four weeks back; and Dutton was in a turmoil of talk for days afterwards to make out "what he was." A goodly array of Dutton people had crowded in from other Churches to hear that sermon; not with the smallest intention of being taught by it, but merely to judge therefrom the mental and spiritual standing of the new Rector. Was he able? Was he interesting? Was he dull? Was he High? Was he Evangelical? Was he Broad? Would he think this? Would he say that? Would he do the other? Some asked the more pertinent question, Was he a good man?—But this, translated, too often meant only, Does he hold my opinions?

So they all sat and listened, and each held up as a test the little measuring tape of his own particular views, to see if the Rector's views fitted accurately thereto, in length, and breadth, and thickness.

Certain of the St. John's congregation were present among others; not, of course, from any bad habit of wandering, but solely for the good of their neighbours. If Jem were an undesirable Rector, the sooner folks were warned off from him, the better!

Colonel Atherstone watched solemnly for the "dangerous doctrines," which he had resolved beforehand were sure to come; and Lady Lucas nodded sleepily in a conspicuous corner, content to have pitched upon a party catch-word, with the quoting of which she might thenceforward label him; and Miss Devereux endeavoured perplexedly to wade after thoughts beyond her depth, which were therefore "erroneous."

Others present, like-spirited, though not of St. John's, heard no less critically. Miss Moggridge found him "not Broad enough;" and somebody else found him "not High enough;" at the very moment that Miss Atherstone was settling her bonnet-strings, and privately dubbing him "a concealed Jesuit."

Few among the herd of critics had leisure to notice the childlike trust, the earnest purpose, the burning love to God and man, which swept along the preacher himself, and filled the Church with an overflow of the Spirit of Christ.

For all they wanted to know was: "Which party?" And this they could not find out.

Jem, while an ardent Churchman, was no party-man. He had the strength to accept Divine Truth wherever he found

it, even in the face of its especial patronage by any party.

Naturally, this made his position not an easy one in a place cut up into cliques and parties, social and religious.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SOCIAL BOARD.

"Where men of judgment creep and feel their way,
The positive pronounce without dismay;
Their want of light and intellect supplied
By sparks absurdity strikes out of pride:
Without the means of knowing right from wrong,
They always are decisive, clear, and strong."

COWPER.

DINNER at The Brow was in full swing before anybody held a match to the combustible elements there gathered. Miss Devereux had made fretfully sure of an explosion. She held a ladylike belief that if a gun is present, it is sure to go off, forgetting that even a loaded gun will lie quiescent until somebody pulls the trigger.

Cyril was at his best, handsome and conversational; and Lady Lucas' beaming countenance seemed to bespeak her forgiveness of the company into which she found herself plunged. After all, had not the Trevelyan ancestors—and were there not blue ingredients in the Trevelyan blood?

Mrs. Trevelyan, "Jem's mother" as she was called by many, was the model of a sweet elderly lady, and Evelyn was more like her old self than Jem had yet seen her. Jem himself looked fagged and out of spirits with the worries of the past month. Perhaps he felt a little disappointed at not having to take Evelyn in; at all events, Jean thought so, even while dutifully "not allowing herself" to think anything of the kind. He quite failed to get any manner of a rise out of Miss Moggridge, for the young baronet's entertainment; indeed, conversation flagged much between the two. The one being a man of action, the other a woman of theories, they were less likely to act match and match-box than Cyril had expected.

Miss Moggridge was a lady of independent though small means; not a "companion" in the ordinary sense of the word, since she received nothing from Evelyn but a home and the privilege of dancing attendance upon her. She had no home ties of her own, and she had fallen over head and ears in love with Evelyn, as one woman does sometimes fall in love with another. Miss Moggridge did not gush and fuss sentimentally over her love, as some women do in a like case—women of Sybella's calibre—but she was silently ready to give time and life to the object of her affections. Evelyn, touched by this intense though commonly dumb devotion, and feeling the need of permanent companionship, had somewhat hastily suggested living together—in other words, had offered to take Miss Moggridge into her ménage. The offer had been at once eagerly accepted.

But to have a devoted friend out of the house, and to be with that friend always in the house, are two different things. A friendship, which is only enhanced by the little partings and meetings and excitements of the one existence, will not always stand the pull of the other. The compact had not long been made before Evelyn began, after her wont, to regret it.

She was sincerely fond of Miss Moggridge; yet this fondness was a mild affair compared with the absorbing and jealous worship of the older lady. Miss Moggridge's dumbness of love lessened under the thawing influence of perpetual nearness; and the ardour of a devotion which could never leave its object alone became a weariness to that object. Evelyn loved freedom, even while she craved for more ties; and she found her freedom hampered.

Miss Moggridge was large in make, and superlatively plain. Her face, no less than her body, was large; the nose was crooked; the eyes were small; the teeth were discoloured; the complexion really was "liver-hued." She had not in looks a single redeeming point; and she was also somewhat gauche, somewhat excitable, somewhat opinionated, somewhat clever, and by fits and starts a great talker. Towards Evelyn she was monotonously mild and yielding on all questions of opinion: towards other people she was hardly less monotonously argumentative. All this had been a matter for amusement in the friend whom Evelyn saw for an hour or two at a time, but in her perpetual companion, she did not like it so well. She was equally teased by the inevitable agreement with herself, and by the inevitable disagreement with the rest of the world.

There were oppositions and inconsistencies in Miss Moggridge, as in most human beings. Theologically she prided herself on being Broad; and she showed her share of

human contractedness by her unlimited abuse of those whom she counted "Narrow." The abuse was not couched in unladylike terms, but it was sufficiently severe; and to Evelyn such tirades always came as an attack upon her husband's memory. Of course, she never said so; and Miss Moggridge never guessed what Evelyn felt, or the tirades would have ceased in her hearing. As they did not cease, they helped to loosen the bond which attached the two ladies together.

Miss Moggridge was also an advocate for "female rights;" and on this topic she was apt to wax explosive, to the immense delight of young men, who, calm in the consciousness of their inborn superiority, could afford to smile. Miss Moggridge might not "see it," but so much the better fun. Evelyn, however, did not accept certain modern versions of female rights, and she had begun to grow tired of the declamations on this subject, once only entertaining.

Side by side with such characteristics were to be found in Miss Moggridge a large modicum of womanly tenderness when something or somebody called it out; a painful womanly consciousness of her own ugliness; and a vehement love of beauty. There is something pathetic in such a beauty-loving soul as hers, enshrined in so clumsy a casket. If, in any mysterious sense, the soul can be supposed to secrete the body, as a mollusc secretes its shell, one can only wonder how Miss Moggridge's poetic soul should have put forth so inadequate an expression of itself.

This jumble of characteristics in female form was now Evelyn's chosen companion. For how long? Perhaps for the rest of her life. Could anything ever separate them? Evelyn sometimes put this question to herself drearily; not that she did not love Miss Moggridge, but that she did not love to be bound.

"I must never marry again; that is certain," she said to herself, with a flickering smile. "So soon as I am tied to a person, I want to be free."

But would Miss Moggridge go, if Evelyn desired it? Could Evelyn ever have the heart to ask her to do so? There were days when Evelyn felt herself under a hopeless incubus. Companionship was all very well; but to be incessantly watched, followed, petted, advised, cared for, was a little too much—at her age, and after years of liberty. She panted under the oppression. Had Miss Moggridge suddenly vanished, Evelyn would have felt lonely; but none the less, this sensation that she could not, if she would, get rid of Miss Moggridge, fretted her.

To return to the dinner-party at Ripley Brow.

Miss Moggridge, like Sybella, was fond of lively colouring. The possession of a poetic soul did not imbue her with good taste in clothing her body. To gratify Evelyn, she had suppressed a startling cheese-hued costume, and wore nothing worse than sea-green. Lady Lucas was in black velvet; Mrs. Trevelyan and Evelyn were in black silk; Sybella alone was resplendent in sheeny mauve and snowy lace. Jean's white dress was the simplest imaginable; her only ornament being one large pearl-pin in her abundant hair; but Cyril again told himself that "he had never seen Jean so handsome." He did not this time make the observation aloud.

For a while Admiral Grice's gout and Sybella's assortment of mild ailments had full swing. Some at table were amused to overhear scraps of the dialogue, with its perpetual—

"I have had that—!" "I know so well what that is!" "I have gone through just the same!" "I assure you, I suffered from

—"My doctor advised me—" "I was recommended to take
—" each seeming anxious to outvie the other in dolefulness
of experience.

If one cannot hope to shine in any other respect, one may at least seek to excel in the matter of aches and pains.

Mr. and Mrs. Trevelyan were in a steady swing of talk; Giles Cuthbert in subdued and sleepy tones made himself agreeable to Evelyn; Cyril kept Lady Lucas going; and Jean, far from looking bored, enjoyed her companion—a pleasant and gentlemanly young fellow, when he could be kept clear of certain controversial subjects which were to him as a red rag to a bull.

Rub the first, not to be called an explosion, was on the score of weather—a fruitful subject at all times for discussion. Sybella had long ago taken the winds of the neighbourhood under her especial patronage. She knew all about them, always; and with a person who can never be in the wrong, it is perilous to suggest a mistake. There could be no surer road to Miss Devereux's displeasure, than to assert that a breeze was northerly when she counted it westerly.

Unwittingly Mr. Trevelyan made this blunder. He alluded to the fact of a "strong south-east wind" that day, not three minutes after Miss Devereux had enlarged to her Admiral on the pleasantness of a "nice soft south wind." Of course, he had not heard her; but, of course, she did not believe this.

Sybella reddened, and turned from her gouty Admiral, who had wisely listened without comment, to the offender.

"I assure you—" she interposed—"I assure you, the wind has been exactly south all day. I watched the clouds for ever so long; and they were coming precisely from the

south. Some may be so easily mistaken, because of currents of air down here; but up there, you know, one cannot be wrong."

Miss Devereux was nothing if not scientific.

"And I know—The weathercock! Oh, I don't think one can always depend on weathercocks. Beside, the weathercock must have pointed south to-day. I know by my own feelings. Any east in the wind always affects me directly. I am so sensitive to an east wind. It has been direct south the whole day."

Mr. Trevelyan bowed slightly, and intimated that a gentleman might not contradict a lady.

"But anybody must know who has paid attention," persisted the lady, feeling the gentleman unconvinced. Miss Devereux not only counted herself always in the right; she could not be content unless others counted her the same; and this was rather difficult to bring about. "I assure you, if there had been the very least east in the wind, I could not have ventured out with my neuralgia. East winds are so dangerous. People who are strong, of course—But it was because the wind was south that I thought it so safe."

Mr. Trevelyan bowed again. He had a way of looking down upon Sybella, mentally as well as bodily, from his superior height, which she was conscious of, while unable to define it.

For the hundredth time, she wondered, "What dear Cyril could find to like in that disagreeable man?"

And her voice had an injured intonation as she continued—

"It is quite extraordinary how few people understand the direction of the wind."

"But we at The Brow, being near the clouds, are always accurately informed," put in Cyril wickedly from the further end of the table.

"Suppose we agree to call it south, and settle the matter," suggested Evelyn's soft tones. "Things are very much to us as we believe them."

"There was once an old gentleman," drawled Cuthbert, "who could never go out in an east wind. Quite impossible, you know. It always gave him bronchitis. Invariably. But a kind friend one day tied the weathercock, with the vane pointing west, while the wind blew from the east. The old gentleman went out for his constitutional, rejoicing in the west wind; and—wonderful to say—he caught no cold."

Sybella was offended. "Of course, I understand," she said. "Of course; Mr. Cuthbert means it is all fancy. But—" and a hiatus.

"I beg your pardon. There are no such things as fancies in the present day. It is all neurotic," explained Giles, with fascinating mildness.

"My story was merely a little illustration of the interaction between mind and matter—perhaps one may say, of the mastery of mind over matter."

"I thought it was an old schoolmaster," Jean said, while Sybella was trying to understand. "And a school-boy's trick."

"My dear Jean, never put a story right, when the moral is as good one way as the other," murmured Evelyn.

Jean laughed; and before Miss Devereux could make up her mind about that mysterious word, "neurotic," the talk drifted in a fresh direction.

Rub the second was again between the hostess and her Rector. Mr. Trevelyan dropped among matters ecclesiastical in conversation with gentle Mrs. Trevelyan, who always liked to dig a little information out of a man, whether or no her feminine brain could entirely assimilate it. He made unfortunate mention of "The Father's;" and Miss Devereux—scarcely more apt to fall foul of east winds than to fall foul of "the Fathers," all the more because she knew so little about them—overheard the remark.

Sybella bristled up for action immediately; and Mr. Byng sent her a startled glance of sympathy up the length of the table; but being far distant, and being moreover a good deal charmed with his neighbour, Jean Trevelyan, he left actual fighting to Miss Devereux. She was equal to the occasion. Remedies for the Admiral's next attack of gout had to wait, while Sybella plunged into the fray—mauve silk and all, to the rescue of principle! Mr. Trevelyan found himself unexpectedly tackled, and put upon the defensive.

Miss Devereux was "quite sure the Fathers were not infallible. So very extraordinary that people should talk of them as they did! And only last Wednesday, Mr. Kennedy had pointed out in his sermon—Mr. Byng of course would remember—" with an appealing look—"had pointed out to them so carefully how all the Fathers contradicted each other about everything. So how could they possibly be infallible?"

Mr. Byng did remember, and he would have said more, but for a peculiar expression in Jean's eyes. He had never felt himself under exactly the same restraint.

"It is Mr. Kennedy who is infallible; not the Fathers," declared that dreadful Miss Moggridge, whipping unexpectedly into the discussion. "I don't know that they ever professed to be—did they, Mr. Trevelyan? But if Mr. Kennedy holds up his finger, and says, 'I think—' we are all to bow down to his decision."

Miss Devereux drew up her head, and opined that for anybody to say such things of such a man as Mr. Kennedy—

"Say such things! I only say he is a modern Pope! Infallible out-and-out. Much worse than to be an infallible company of old gentlemen!" said Miss Moggridge irreverently. "One would at least keep the others in check; but there's nobody to keep Mr. Kennedy in check. As for their contradicting one another, Mr. Kennedy contradicts himself every other minute. Infallible people always do—not only the Fathers."

A faint shadow of annoyance passed over Evelyn's face.

"Such a devotedly good man!" sighed Miss Devereux. "I am sure, if Mr. Kennedy—"

"But I don't see what his goodness has to do with the question," said Miss Moggridge, getting for the first time a little excited, and flipping a crumb over the table. "Popes generally are pretty good men, I believe—Protestants or otherwise. We're not in the Middle Ages now. I suppose the Fathers were good men too—but that didn't make them infallible, necessarily. Any more than Mr. Kennedy's goodness makes him infallible—or keeps him from being dull!"—sotto voce.

"There is, perhaps, a possibility," interposed Mr. Trevelyan, in a solemn and repressive voice, which somehow brought Miss Moggridge to a halt, "just a possibility, viewed even from the mere standpoint of common-sense, that the

combined utterance of many good men may be likely to speak fuller and more sober truth than the single voice of one good man. Collective wisdom ought to contain more than individual wisdom. If I am in doubt on some theological point, I am naturally more disposed to turn to a consensus of thoughtful opinions, from the Fathers of the Church generally, than to appeal merely to one excellent man—however unexceptionable he may be as an individual."

Miss Devereux didn't see it, and in perturbed tones, she said so. "The Fathers, she knew, were full of error. Full of error!"— and she performed vehemently the "invisible soap and imperceptible water" operation with her two hands.

"Is anything human not more or less full of error?" Jem asked in a low voice.

Miss Devereux had no wish to listen to either Jem or Mr. Trevelyan. Instruction was the last thing she desired. She felt that she had the best of it; and so doubtless in a sense she had; for she was attacking what Mr. Trevelyan was not defending; and since she knew a great deal more about his views than he did himself, it was not of the slightest use for him to disclaim belief in the infallibility of the Fathers. Miss Devereux knew better. Let Mr. Trevelyan say what he would, she could still go on with her monotonous protest—"Full of error! Full of error!"

"May I ask which of the Fathers you studied last?" asked Mr. Trevelyan.

Sybella was horrified. Read the Fathers! How could he suppose that she would do anything so fraught with peril? Then she looked appealingly at Mr. Byng; but Mr. Byng was tongue-tied by the lurking disdain in Jean's greenish eyes—

a disdain more unequivocally expressed in the corners of Mr. Trevelyan's mouth, as he sank into silence. Evelyn once more, with her skilful grace, broke up the discussion, and resolutely started other topics.

"Too bad," Miss Moggridge said to Jem, not referring to Evelyn, but to the change of subject. "I should have liked to see those two fight it out."

Jem moved his head negatively, smiling. "A waste of strength," he said. "Life is too short for skirmishes which cannot lead to victory."

Rub number three did not come till they were all in the drawing-room, the gentlemen having just joined the ladies. This time Cyril was the offender, not Mr. Trevelyan; and Lady Lucas was the offended, not Sybella.

Cyril had not altogether liked Jean's interest in her talk with the Curate at dinner. He had enjoyed the discussions and Miss Moggridge; but he had not enjoyed the sight of those two intent faces. It was all very well for Mr. Byng to admire Jean; but for Jean to be so wrapped up in a subdued dialogue, as not to hear when Cyril spoke to her, was by no means right. Jean belonged to him; whether or no he meant to have her for a permanent possession; and nobody else had a right to Jean.

He had not noticed before what a good-looking young fellow Mr. Byng really was; and the confidential tone in which the Curate expounded his ideas to his listener during dessert made Cyril wrathful. He was no given to wrathfulness about small things; but this could hardly be called a small thing.

Cyril had not recovered his equilibrium when he came into the drawing-room. Jean was standing on the rug, in her white dress, conspicuously tall and slight; the pale face,

with its steadfast eyes, conspicuously free from self-consciousness. She was looking at a photograph; and straight as an arrow Mr. Byng went to her side. Cyril forthwith did the same. He was not going to stand that sort of thing.

Mr. Byng made some allusion to their past conversation, which Jean answered smilingly, turning a little towards him and from Cyril as she did so.

Thereupon Cyril forgot himself. If there was one subject more than another which he ought strenuously to have avoided, with Lady Lucas seated only a few yards off upon the nearest sofa, it was aught connected with family disagreeables. Whatever he might think of her mode of action, she as his guest had a right to his silence. But Cyril at that moment could only think of Jean; and in his eagerness to gain her attention, he rushed into the first remark which occurred to him.

"I say, Jean—" with subdued determination to have his own way, though with no outward sign of annoyance: "Jean!—"

Then, "I beg your pardon!" politely to Mr. Byng, and Mr. Byng retreated.

"Jean, you won't forget to take your father soon to call on my friends? You know—at the red house—"

"Captain and Mrs. Lucas! O yes," Jean answered. She too forgot about Lady Lucas. "I will remind my father. When do they come?"

"To-day. So the sooner you can go, the better."

"Hardly. It would be merciful to allow them a few days for settling in."

"Oh, no need. The house is furnished, and has been all put to rights. Only a little unpacking to do; and they are too good travellers to think anything of that. I shall go in to-morrow, and tell them to expect you."

Lady Lucas stood up and moved forward, while her black velvet skirts trailed imposingly. Her plump hands held a large feather fan.

"I think I can hardly be mistaken," she said, looking from Cyril to Jean. "One does not wish to overhear; but—" with a dignified smile—"my own name has a familiar sound, and you did not talk in whispers. Yet surely—it is impossible. That unhappy man cannot have obtained a footing in this house!"

Cyril felt rather like a naughty boy, and he had to brace himself with the recollection that of "this house," he was master. He went a little nearer to Lady Lucas, with his pretty air of courtesy—boyish still—leaving Jean on the rug. Except Admiral Grice and the older ladies, no one had yet sat down. Evelyn was talking with Jem and Mr. Trevelyan in the distant bow-window; and Mr. Byng had retired to Giles Cuthbert.

"I met Captain Lucas abroad," Cyril observed.

"But your aunt—Miss Devereux—"

"My aunt saw him once. Not oftener. They are friends of mine," said Cyril bravely, as a sudden thought came to him of Emmeline—courageous little Emmeline, with so much in life to render her sad.

"Miss Devereux will not call," Lady Lucas stated. She had ceased smiling, and no longer looked gracious.

"Perhaps not." Cyril's manner became more resolute. "I am sorry this has come up," he said frankly. "It is not the time or place—and I forgot. But since it has, I ought to explain. I met the Lucases abroad; and I assure you, I found them most kind—as pleasant as could be. I like them immensely—yes—him!" in reply to a monosyllable. "I mean—one is so sorry for him, and he does fight so hard not to be overcome. I don't really think it's a case when everybody ought to stand aloof. I don't—really, Lady Lucas."

"You will, I suppose, permit 'everybody' to judge for themselves," said Lady Lucas. "I quite understand that Sir Cyril Devereux is perfectly independent in these matters; and time alone can teach experience. It is, of course, useless for me to assort that my unhappy nephew is unfit to associate with gentlemen. That is only an old lady's opinion—though it is held by some who are not old ladies."

"I am very sorry," apologised Cyril. "But if you were to see him now—"

"We shall, I think, do little good by discussing the question. Only I must beg you to remember one thing, Sir Cyril—that I do not meet or acknowledge Captain Lucas or his wife. And, excuse me—in your position you ought to be careful. You do not know what you may be drawn into."

Sir Cyril made a little gesture of comprehension, not of assent, and Lady Lucas swept her trailing skirts away. Sybella was on a more distant sofa, and thither the lady retreated. A murmured conference between the two began.

"You have been quite wrong, my dear," Lady Lucas said softly. "Sir Cyril ought to have been put into some regular profession—the Army, or anything—for a few years. I told

you so long ago. He will get into mischief from the sheer lack of something to do."

Then an interruption came. Jean still stood upon the rug; and Cyril remained where Lady Lucas had left him, lost in thought. Emmeline's dark sunny little face was before his mind's eye.

"I will call—of course, I will call. What rubbish!" he said to himself.

A curious croaking sound drew the attention of all—a sound as of something giving way.

"Jean!" her father called in an agitated shout from the bow-window. "Back, Jean!!" He was too far to do more than shout, as he saw the great mirror over the mantelpiece seem to detach itself, and for an appreciable fraction of a second lean forward. Jean, with her instinct of obedience, born of long habit, sprang back, not hesitating for even the fraction of a second; while Cyril, hearing both the loud crack and the warning cry, as instinctively started forward. The huge mirror crashed heavily down; one sharp edge tearing a wide rent down Jean's white skirt, and bringing her to her knees; the other striking Cyril prostrate.

Sybella's shrieks almost drowned the loud crash of shattered glass: Sybella herself keeping at a safe distance. The gentlemen made a simultaneous rush forward; and Jean spoke calmly: "I am not hurt. Please see to Cyril. Never mind me."

Five pairs of hands lifting the massive frame released both; and Jean sprang to her feet. She had been pinned down by the weight pressing on her skirt, but was entirely uninjured.

Mr. Trevelyan held her fast, his hands visibly shaking, and his face grey. "My child! You are sure! Nothing wrong?" he said hoarsely.

Jean had never seen him so overcome.

"Nothing—not a scratch. See—only my dress!" she said reassuringly. "But—"

His lips touched her forehead, with a murmured—

"Thank God!"

And she hardly caught the words following, "I thought it was all up with my Jean."

Then he leant against the back of a tall arm-chair, a glazed look coming over his eyes, and Jean knew that he had difficulty in holding himself upright. Before she could speak, however, he had rallied, though not without a supreme effort of will.

"Merely a passing sensation—a touch of dizziness," he said cheerfully, in response to her glance. "Not worth attention. Come—" and he walked across the room, Jean following closely to the couch where Cyril had just been laid, white to the lips with pain.

Evelyn knelt to support his head, and Sybella hovered round about, in a state of incoherent though talkative distraction.

Cyril looked up at Mr. Trevelyan. "Jem has gone for Dr. Ingram," he said, bringing the words slowly. "I don't think it will be very much . . . The frame caught my shoulder . . . Don't touch, please—" with a shrinking gesture. "I'm only—so glad it wasn't Jean!"

Jean, to her own indignant surprise, actually burst into tears.

CHAPTER VIII.

DARK-EYED EMMIE.

"But who could have expected this,
When we two drew together first,
Just for the obvious human bliss,
To satisfy life's daily thirst?"

R. BROWNING.

THE "queer little red house near the Post-Office," owned by Captain Lucas, had been for three years empty. It was not an easy house to let: standing just too far out of the main track for business purposes, yet too much buried in a region of shops to be attractive. Perhaps Captain Lucas asked too high a rent. One way or another, it had remained long in the hands of an aged caretaker; and the Lucases had troubled their heads little about the matter, till sudden curtailment of income came. Then, since nobody else was content to live there, and to pay a reasonable rent, Captain Lucas decided to make it his home.

The decision cost him a good deal; and he would hardly have reached it without necessity. He was not anxious to put himself in the way of relatives, who would look him in the face, and pass him by as a stranger. Captain Lucas was a man who naturally loved society, naturally delighted in pleasant companionship; and to cut himself off from intercourse with his fellow-men was like cutting off his right hand or foot; yet to a large extent, he had done and would do this. Not for a limited time only, but year after year; sustained by his courageous wife, and surely upheld by Divine power: he and she knowing, alas, too well, that only by such means could he hope to keep in check the terrible tendency which all his life had dragged him downward.

The heroism of such a strife, and of the self-denial which it entailed, could only be appreciated by those who knew him best.

But to refuse himself certain perilous indulgences, such as hotels, clubs, dinner-parties, nay, even such as taking lunch or supper with a friend, as a matter of manly self-control, was one thing; and to be treated as an outcast by those to whom he was bound by natural ties, was another thing. The first, however trying, brought a certain sense of satisfaction in his own victory over weakness. The second could bring only smarting and pain.

Moreover, he knew that Dutton would be dull for his wife and child; and Captain Lucas, with all his faults—perhaps it would be more forcible to say, with his one great fault—was an affectionate man. He dearly loved his gentle wife, and his sunny Emmeline. They were all that he had to make life bright. He would have sacrificed much to bring brightness to them; but there seemed to be no choice. He could no longer afford to travel, or to pay rent elsewhere.

There was a charm of manner still about Captain Lucas: a charm which Cyril had felt at once. He was not in the least heroic-looking; not tall, and rather stout; while the face, which had once been handsome, was marred by early years of self-indulgence. Still he had retained the manners of a gentleman; and he had by nature an unusual power of making himself agreeable.

His wife and daughter loved him dearly despite all they had endured through him—despite the shame he had made them suffer. And for more than a year he had not once given way. Emmeline's tender little heart was sure—quite sure—he never would again. The poor wife would fain have felt equally sure. She better understood the power of sudden temptation.

As Cyril had told Jean, the house was furnished, albeit in an old fashioned style. Dark pictures in heavy frames half covered the walls; thick curtains shut out much of Heaven's light; chairs of ponderous make stood solemnly about the small rooms; and huge centre-tables left little space around.

Emmeline did what she could to improve matters. She arranged and re-arranged the uncompromising furniture; she draped the curtains anew; she dragged centre-tables into corners; above all, she shed the light of her own smiling presence through the little house, and in a measure transformed it—for others, rather than for herself. The shining of a star flows outward, not inward; and a blazing body like the sun may conceivably have a dark interior.

Emmeline's mental "interior" was not dark; she was too brave-spirited to be often a victim of depression. Still, when a week in the new home had gone by, she was conscious of a dreary aspect to things generally—more conscious than on

their first arrival. She had worked desperately hard; and now she was tired, and little remained to be done.

Moreover, she was labouring under a sense of disappointment, which means a worse kind of tiredness than mere weariness of back or limbs. Through the whole week Sir Cyril Devereux had never once been near the house. Nobody had been. Nobody had called. Nobody had spoken a word or left a message of welcome. The three seemed to be stranded on a barren shore, where none cared to greet them. Emmeline had known much of such isolation in her short life; yet somehow she never grew used to it, for she always saw how different life was to other people. There are some kinds of mental, as of bodily pain, to which the sufferer never does or can grow really used.

Like most girls, she had her girlish love of friends and companions, her girlish enjoyment of chatter and fun, her girlish longings and dreams. She had built a good deal—much more than she was aware—on the prospect of Sir Cyril's friendship; not so much for herself as for her parents. She was hardly more than a child yet; but she knew how much her father liked Sir Cyril, and how good it was for him to have outside interests—so long as no danger was involved—and how it cheered her mother to have her father in good spirits.

When Captain Lucas had written to tell Sir Cyril of their plans, he had replied that he "would be sure to look in directly they came." And Emmeline had set her little heart on the fulfilment of this promise.

It had not been fulfilled, and Emmeline was sorely disappointed, because she felt that it was a disappointment to her father and mother. She liked Sir Cyril herself, with a frank girlish liking; but it was honestly for their sake that

she grieved. It did seem hard that nobody could be depended on.

"Only a week, of course!" commented Emmeline. "One week is not long. But he said directly—and if I were a man, I would do what I had said, if it were ever so hard."

Persistent rain had fallen all the morning and was falling still, making the Dutton pavements wet, making the Dutton world muddy. To keep up one's spirits on such a day is always more difficult than in sunshine.

Emmeline stood at the window of the crooked little drawing-room, looking across at a second-rate grocer's shop, in the open doorway of which stood a woman, contemplating the weather. There was not much else to be contemplated. A cart jogged slowly by, between the two gazers; but not many vehicles came this way. The red house stood out of the main line of traffic.

Emmeline was seventeen years old, and a pretty girl. She had childishly rounded cheeks, the bright colouring of which did not fade under fatigue; only the soft dark eyes, usually dancing with fun, had grown a trifle heavy. Her dainty little hands held a duster, for she had just finished arranging the last shelves of unpacked books.

"And now I really don't think there is anything more to be done," sighed Emmeline.

"Talking to yourself, Em?" asked a gentle voice.

Emmeline's face flashed into immediate brightness, as she turned towards a pale-faced lady, fragile and sweet-looking.

"O mother! I didn't hear you come in. Yes, I believe I was doing what that maid called 'siloloquising.' Isn't it a horrid

day? Come and look-out."

"Should we not be better repaid if we studied the fire instead?"

"Then you'll sit down in this arm-chair—" running to pull it forward. "And here is a stool—and here is a cushion. I'll tuck my duster away—and then we can be cosy. So my father has gone out?"

"He wanted to take you; but I thought it best not, as you have a cold, and he meant to go some distance."

"Oh, my cold is nothing. I wish you had told me." Emmeline knelt on the rug looking thoughtfully at a purple flame.
"Mother, Sir Cyril has never been—after all!"

"No."

"Do you think he will come?"

"I can't tell. He meant to do so, I am sure. But he has his aunt to consider; and she is a friend of Lady Lucas."

"Only he wrote and promised. I don't think he is very fond of his aunt."

"She brought him up. I suppose he owes her some submission."

"But he said the Trevelyan's would call."

"I dare say they will drop their cards some day."

"Mother—" and a pause.

Mrs. Lucas put back the short dark hair which clustered round the girl's brow.

"What is your mind so busy about to-day, dear?"

"I'm thinking just now about that old lady—about Lady Lucas—" resentfully. "I'm glad you don't think I need speak of her as 'aunt,' because she doesn't certainly behave like an aunt."

"She would no doubt prefer that you should not."

"Mother, do you suppose she is a good woman?"

"I always suppose every one to be good until I know the contrary."

"But—" with a half laugh, yet still resentfully—"don't we know it? If she were good—Mother, she knows all about my father!" the girl burst out in choked tones.

The mother and daughter did not often allow themselves to talk of the family skeleton which haunted them. They would speak in vague terms of the ever-present necessity to "amuse" and "take care of" the household head; their work in life being to strengthen his resolution, to ward off peril, to aid and abet him in the daily fight. But the dread, always more or less pressing on them, was seldom specifically alluded to. Once in a way, however, the subject would come up; and Mrs. Lucas would not check her child's confidence. She could see now that Emmie's heart was full to overflowing.

"Yes, dear."

"She knows all that so well. Shouldn't you think, if she were a really good woman, she would want to do something to help? She would not leave him alone, to feel dull and miserable, and perhaps to—Mother, she must know how bad

that is for him—how much harder it makes it for him to keep on."

"I don't suppose she thinks of the question from his side at all, but only from her own."

"But then it isn't goodness—it's all selfishness."

"There's a good deal of selfishness among people—yes, even people who are more or less 'good.' And most people's 'goodness' is very much alloyed—not pure gold—not even 18-carat gold. Only a little gold, mixed with very inferior metals. I suppose one ought to be glad to find any gold at all, in anybody."

"I don't believe there is a speck of gold in Lady Lucas."

"Ah, that is just what you and I can't judge. We can't see with her eyes, you know, or understand exactly how things look to her. She may be acting most conscientiously even in keeping away from us. I believe she really is extremely kind and benevolent—to other people."

"People who don't need it."

"People who do need it."

"Oh—the poor. But then, of course, that is quite easy. People are praised for being kind to the poor," said Emmeline shrewdly.

"Yes; and she would not be praised for kindness to us. Her friends would even say—'How odd!'"

"I would not stop for such a reason."

"It is not at all impossible that Sir Cyril may."

"But it isn't as if my father—It isn't as if all that were not over—"

"Or rather, as if he were not fighting a brave battle! Even if it should not just yet be complete victory, I do think he ought to have help and sympathy . . . But that is not the way some people judge."

Emmie sighed deeply. "It seems so very very hard," she said. "When he does try so!"

"Men have to pay the penalty for past wrongdoing," Mrs. Lucas went on patiently, as if dissecting the question. "We have to pay it—we with him. Even you, dear. It may seem hard—suffering for what one has not done. Yet that has to be. All wrong that is done, brings evil upon others. It is one of the great mysteries of life. By-and-by, we shall understand better—the reasons, I mean—the why and the wherefore. Perhaps not in this life. We can only see now that it is one of the laws of our being—inevitable, I suppose. If a mother is careless, her child pays the penalty . . . Your father suffers for what his father was.

"He said that once to me. Last year—" in smothered accents. "It frightened me. He said he had inherited the craving. He said it was born in him. Must one inherit such things?"

"One person may, and another may not. And if one does inherit the taste, there is no must be about using it. We have it in our choice whether to use or not to use the things we are born with. It is the same all round. You have inherited two eyes; but whether you use those eyes is at your own option. If you like to bandage them up all your life, you will slay them by disuse."

"Mother, I think that's a lovely idea."

"I have had to work these questions out by myself. If a little child uses his legs, they grow large and strong with exercise; but if you pack them in cotton-wool and never let him stand, they will wither and become useless . . . It is the same with evil things. Suppose you did inherit a taste—that taste—still it could never grow into a craving, except through indulgence . . . I think, perhaps, your father did inherit the inclination—he always says so. But, after all, it might have been nothing. If he had been guarded as a child, and brought up to shun the danger, instead of being incessantly tempted, he might have grown in time as strong as other men to resist. The weakness of will came through long yielding. That has made the struggle so hard."

Emmeline drew another long breath, "Then nobody need be conquered," she said. "Nobody need go down—hopelessly."

"Nobody, Emmie! Never! There is always help to be had—if only one is willing."

Emmeline dashed away one or two tears. "A carriage at the door," she said softly. "And—I do think it is Sir Cyril."

Emmeline's flush and brightness sent a pain to the mother's heart. She could not analyse the causes of her child's pleasure, and it made her fear for the future. Yet what could be said or done? For her husband's sake, she might not check the friendship.

Sir Cyril came in slowly, pale but smiling, his right arm bound across his chest.

"Oh, you have had an accident?" exclaimed Emmie, in distressed tones.

"Yes. Did you think me very long in making my appearance?" with a warm left-handed greeting to each.

He held Emmie's fingers a trifle longer than was quite necessary. The past talk had deepened to a lovely crimson the colour in her cheeks; and the soft dark eyes showed traces of tears, for which Cyril thought the little face looked all the sweeter. It was a sweet little face, and the very antipodes of Jean's! Two girls more unlike one another could hardly have been found. Emmie was dark and rosy, tender and plump, clinging and kitten-like. Jean was straight, slender and pale, reserved and independent.

But as for which of the two Sir Cyril admired the most? Since he himself was unable to answer that question, it is unlikely that any one else should be able to answer it for him. He only knew that he liked best for the moment whichever he happened to be with.

"We hoped to see you soon," Mrs. Lucas made answer, for Emmie was dumb.

"I should have come days ago, if I hadn't been hors de combat."

Cyril lowered himself carefully into the offered arm-chair. He was unable to bear the jar of a quick movement.

"This is the first time I have been out of the house. I am afraid my aunt will be rather scandalised; but she is gone to a kettledrum somewhere—"

Cyril did not feel obliged to state that the kettledrum was at Lady Lucas; the more since his unfortunate word "scandalised" had brought a faint flush to Mrs. Lucas' cheek.

"So I privately ordered the carriage to be ready to bring me here, after taking her there. I mustn't stay long—but—"

"I am afraid you are in pain," said Mrs. Lucas, as he broke off, pressing his lips together.

"Thanks, it can't be helped. We had a dinner-party last week—the day you came—and the large mirror over the fireplace came down with a crash. No warning at all. I was underneath, and the frame just caught me—broke my collar-bone, and damaged the arm a good deal. I shall be all right in a few weeks."

"And nobody else was hurt?"

"Luckily not, Jean Trevelyan stepped back just in time. I should have escaped too, but I stupidly started forward—heard her father shout, and didn't know what it meant."

"You thought she wanted help?" suggested Emmeline, with bright eyes.

"I suppose it was a feeling of that sort. I don't know. There wasn't time to think. One does the sort of thing instinctively."

"Is that the Miss Trevelyan you want us to know?" asked Emmie timidly.

"Yes, you will see her soon. She hasn't been yet, I am afraid, for her father has been ill. I fancy he was unwell before, and the shock upset him. After he got home, he had a sort of unconscious attack—not exactly fainting. Dr. Ingram says he is overworked, and orders—"

Cyril broke off anew, clutching the arm of the chair with his left hand.

"Emmie, ring for some tea. Sir Cyril looks as if he needed it."

"I ought not to let you—but—" apologised Cyril, with a glance at the bell.

He began to feel that he had done a foolish thing in coming out before leave was granted. The jolting of the carriage had brought on a fit of pain in the injured arm and shoulder, momentarily waxing more severe; and Cyril was never good at enduring pain. It turned him yellow-white; and he dared not move.

"Don't stir, or try to talk," said Mrs. Lucas. "I am afraid you ought to have stayed at home. Emmie, dear, that bottle of strong salts—no, I cannot tell you exactly where it is. I shall find it more quickly myself."

Mrs. Lucas vanished, and Cyril rested his head against the chair-back. Emmie stood watching him, with a gaze full of distressful pity. She was always easily stirred by the sight of suffering. For some seconds, Cyril was too much occupied with himself to notice her. Then a fresh stab in the arm brought an uncontrollable start, a change of posture, and a sharp drawing in of his breath, as if he hardly knew how to bear it. A faint sob from Emmie made him look up, to see a pair of dark eyes overflowing, a pair of sweet lips quivering. He tried to smile and to reassure her.

"It doesn't matter. I shall be all right presently."

"Oh, but I am so sorry. It is so bad now."

Tea came in, and Emmie could hardly wait for the tray to be put down. She poured out, and brought the cup to his side, forgetting to cry in her eagerness.

"Let me hold it, please," she entreated. "You must keep still."

Cyril obeyed, by no means unwillingly. The dark rosy little face, with its mingled tears and smiles, looked wondrously attractive, bending so near his own; and as he lifted his left hand to steady the cup, it came in contact with her small soft fingers. She had such a tiny round plump hand, the very antipodes of Jean's long slender one. The touch sent a curious sensation through Cyril. He began to wonder—to feel almost sure—and yet he was not quite sure. He had to lean back and to close his eyes, till the fit of pain should lessen; and Mrs. Lucas returned with the salts; and Cyril tried to analyse his own state of mind, feeling the pulse of his mental being. But it would not do. He could come to no conclusion, and thinking made his head ache; so he gave in, and left matters to settle themselves.

Miss Devereux found out about her nephew's escapade, although he was safely at home before the carriage went for her; and she gave it to him hot and strong for his imprudence. No wickeder word existed for Miss Devereux in the British vocabulary than that dire word "Imprudence."

Remonstrances and warnings floated over him, however, almost unnoticed. All the evening, between sharp twinges in the arm, and dull throbs in the shoulder, he saw Emmie's soft eyes, dark and tender and overflowing.

Jean's calm light-coloured eyes never looked thus. Dear old Jean! There was nobody exactly like her in the world—but she could not vie with Emmie Lucas in bewitching sweetness.

CHAPTER IX.

COMPLEXITIES OF LIFE.

"The same old baffling questions! O my friend,
I cannot answer them . . .

• • • • •

"I have no answer for myself or thee,
Save that I learned beside my mother's knee
'All is of God that is, and is to be;
 And God is good.' Let this suffice us still,
Resting in childlike trust upon His will
Who moves to His great ends, un thwarted by the ill."

J. G.

WHITTIER.

NEARLY a fortnight had passed since the memorable dinner-party; and Mr. Trevelyan had been unwell, even ill, all the fortnight through. That one moment of dire alarm about Jean appeared to have acted on him as the "last straw," minus which he might presumably have fought on a few weeks longer.

Nobody else would have fought on half as long: so said Dr. Ingram, called in three days later.

Mr. Trevelyan made nothing of the slight attack of unconsciousness, which frightened Jean, after their return home; but all next day he was heavy and listless, unable to

employ himself. He still strove against the need for medical advice, declaring that a day or two of rest would set him up. A severe cold next laid hold upon him, however, with persistent hoarseness, and sharp rheumatic pains; and at length, he succumbed.

Dr. Ingram found the once vigorous frame of Stewart Trevelyan enfeebled to an extent which would hardly have been thought credible by any one who had witnessed only a few days earlier his apparent energy. The energy had long been a matter of iron will, not of physical strength; and the marvel was that a breakdown had not arrived sooner.

"Then I am to take care of myself, as a matter of duty," stated Mr. Trevelyan, after listening to Dr. Ingram's opinion. "Very well. If it is my duty, there's no more to be said."

Mr. Trevelyan's notion of "taking care" might not altogether coincide with his doctor's; still, so far as his reasoning faculties were convinced, he promised to make a difference. He would not for the present walk so far, or sit up so late; and he would endeavour to be in by sundown—unless urgently wanted out. Duty to his people would, of course, come first.

"Duty to them may be included in duty to yourself," suggested Dr. Ingram. "If you are not careful, your duty to them may be short-lived."

"Thanks for plain-speaking. Now I know what I am about," said Mr. Trevelyan.

Jean gave herself up to the care of her father; went hither and thither unweariedly, that he might have the less to do; and left mere calls upon friends for the future. The Lucases, like others, had to wait.

To have Mr. Trevelyan even partially incapacitated was a new experience for Jean. She had never before realised the amount of work which he daily accomplished without fuss, for the thorough care of his extensive though not thickly-populated Parish, until now, when much had to be left undone, and much rested on her own shoulders.

He was little better yet—one dismally wet day, about a fortnight after the dinner-party. Cold and hoarseness, rheumatism and weakness, were persistent; and fight as he might against these ailments, he could not vanquish them.

For two Sundays, he had been unable to preach from sheer voicelessness. It was all very well for him to promise "not to attempt so much as usual." What he did do was the very utmost that he had power to accomplish; and none knew this better than Dr. Ingram.

The temperature was barely above freezing-point; and the intense chill of almost frozen fog and mud and prevailing damp penetrated everywhere. Mr. Trevelyan had not been out since lunch; and he had found it impossible to keep warm, even over the blazing study fire. Rheumatic aching had him in its grasp; hoarseness was worse; and he looked so ill that Jean wished it had been Dr. Ingram's day for a call. He would come on the morrow; and meantime, as occasional hot baths were ordered, Jean persuaded her father to take one early, and to go straight to bed. For a wonder, Mr. Trevelyan complied.

Somewhat later, Jean went softly into his room, to find him sound asleep; so she moved softly away.

A mass of Parish accounts, which she had taken out of his hands, required attention. It was past six o'clock, and Jean counted on a quiet hour for work. Nobody could be

expected to call late on such a day. But hardly had she taken up her pen, before a quick double tinkle of the back-door bell sounded.

"Somebody wanting something, I suppose," she murmured, with a little thrill of impatience.

"If you please, Miss Trevelyan—"

Jean turned to face the parlour-maid, a new and raw importation.

"Yes, Elizabeth."

"Master's wanted, Miss—very particular."

"My father? He cannot go out."

"There's a man dying, Miss—up the gorge. He's dreadful bad, and he wants to see master as quick as can be."

"Impossible! Up the gorge, in his state—a day like this. What is the man's name?"

"Barclay, Miss."

Jean knew what this meant; knew in a moment, as with a flash. She recalled at once her father's last interview with Barclay. The man had been especially insolent, threatening physical force, and Mr. Trevelyan had said at parting, "I shall not call again at present. I cannot force you to listen. But remember one thing—if you are in need, send, and I will come!"

He had told this to Jean on his return; and she understood, only too well, how he would regard his own promise, as well as Barclay's necessity.

"Who has brought the message?"

"It's a man who lives near there—Smithson, the name is."

Elizabeth was a stranger to the neighbourhood.

"Call him into the study, please."

Jean was there, waiting, when Smithson entered—a large and broad-shouldered yet stooping man, with a pale face, well known to Jean as a member of the choir. He was one of Jean's greatest devotees, and would have done anything in the world for Mr. Trevelyan. His home was in a little row of cottages beyond the V-point; and, as he at once began to tell Jean, business had taken him that day past Barclay's solitary cottage. He had not entered it before during Barclay's tenancy, since the latter's determined seclusion prevented all intercourse with his neighbours; but a sound of loud groans induced Smithson to open the door. He found Barclay struck down by apparently mortal illness, though still ready to protest that he wanted no help.

Smithson, then on his way to Dutton by a shorter cut than down the gorge, had lingered only to summon his wife to the aid of the unhappy man; after which, he sped as quickly as possible in quest of Mr. Evans, the Parish doctor. No needless time was lost thenceforward; but the time already lost had settled the matter.

When Smithson once more passed the cottage, on his way from Dutton, late in the afternoon, he found his wife still present, and Barclay in worse agony than before. The doctor had pronounced it a hopeless case. Too late to do anything, he said. He would look in again next morning, and he promised some medicine meantime; but he did not expect Barclay to outlive the night.

Barclay knew all this, and his one cry, in the face of approaching death, was for the man he had persistently repelled.

"Send for the Parson! I must see Mr. Trevelyan. For the love of heaven, fetch him quick! For pity's sake, make haste!" were the entreaties and commands gasped out in the midst of mortal pain.

Smithson tried to speak of Mr. Trevelyan's ill-health, but he was not so much as listened to.

"For the love of heaven, be quick! I tell you he'll come! He promised he'd come! For the love of heaven, make haste!"

The labouring breath gave force to these imploring words.

"So I just come off sharp, for I didn't see what else I was to do," continued Smithson: "and I thought you'd know! If it wasn't a matter of life and death—! And Mr. Trevelyan that set on bein' good to him! The times an' agen I've seen him a-goin' there, and the way he's been treated! But anyway it wasn't for me to say 'No' to a man, and he dying."

"You don't think it would do to send for Mr. James Trevelyan? He would go at once."

"Barclay says he'll see none but the Parson, Miss! He's that bent on it! I asked him, and he shouted out 'No!' louder than I'd have thought he could. And I doubt there mightn't be time," in a lower voice. "He's awful bad. The doctor telled my missis, he might be gone any minute. Seems hard, if he can't have his dying wish, poor chap! But if Mr. Trevelyan ain't fit—"

Jean had never in her life so longed, for some one to appeal to; some one of whom to ask advice. How could she take

upon herself the responsibility of calling her father?—Yet how could she take upon herself the other responsibility of not calling him? Jean's was no weak nature, loving to shirk responsibilities; but this was a terrible ordeal. It might be a matter of life and death for Mr. Trevelyan! Yet, if Barclay should die, vainly craving the promised help, because she had deliberately withheld it—what would her father say?

The echo of that passionate appeal—

"For the love of heaven, be quick!" filled the room, and entered into Jean's compassionate heart.

She tried to speak of her father's state, of the peril to him of such an expedition; but the words died on her lips. Jean knew already that the thing had to be.

"Wait here till I come back," she said; and she went upstairs.

What ought she to do? That question stood out prominently. She had no doubt at all as to what her father would expect her to do; but the question was, ought she to sacrifice him to the needs of Barclay?—She, his child!

It might mean the sacrifice of his health, if not worse. Jean faced this fact. In his weakened state, a long walk in such weather after dark might mean a fatal chill. The possibility was not so vivid for Jean, as it would have been for most people, since she been educated to disregard questions of health; still she was conscious of danger. Dr. Ingram had spoken serious warnings.

If she awakened her father, and appealed to his judgment, he would go. Jean knew this perfectly well. He had never been used to put his own comfort or safety before the needs of his people; and she knew that he would not do so

now. By calling him, Jean would practically decide the matter.

He would inevitably blame her if she did not call him; he would be displeased—nay, more than displeased, absolutely wrathful. Jean had never yet dared to go against Mr. Trevelyan's iron will; but she had it in her to dare, if only she could feel herself right in so going. She would be able to face his anger, if only convinced of what ought to be done. Would she be right to leave him in ignorance of Barclay's state?

Jean had fought the same battle many a time in miniature; but she had never known so hard a fight. She could far more easily have sacrificed herself than another. That her lips should be the ones to summon him to peril was bitter indeed. Yet from the main question she did not flinch. If the thing were right, she would do it. Many a woman in her place would have very easily decided to let Mr. Trevelyan sleep on, sending the messenger to Jem; but with Jean, such a course of action was impossible, unless she deliberately felt it to be her duty. Then she would be strong to do, and brave to endure all consequences. But if she saw distinctly the peril to her father, she saw no less distinctly the reverse side of the matter—Barclay's need, and Mr. Trevelyan's responsibility.

He was sleeping still when she entered the room; drops of heat and weakness standing on his brow; the face drawn and thin. A great wave of distress and perplexity rolled over Jean. She to have to rouse him from his quiet sleep; to send him forth into the chill evening air; to summon him, perhaps, to his death. And for what? For a graceless wretch who, during long months, had stubbornly resisted Mr. Trevelyan's kindness, had utterly refused his offered help.

And yet—if she did not?

Barclay had had a loveless and embittering life. He had been almost without softening influences. If now, at last, he were repentant—if in his dire extremity and ignorance, he craved help—if Mr. Trevelyan alone could give that help—might Jean, dared Jean, deny it to him, knowing her father's great pity for and interest in the man?

She held the bedstead with one hand, looking down on the worn face, and tried to imagine herself in Mr. Trevelyan's position—bound by his duties and responsibilities, bound also in this case by a particular promise, Jean knew at once, with vivid certainty, that she would count herself bound to go, irrespective of personal risk; that she would expect to be called; that she would blame severely any one who should venture to deny to her the choice.

Suppose Mr. Trevelyan were allowed to sleep, unknowing; suppose Smithson were sent on, two miles further, to find Jem; suppose meanwhile Barclay died; suppose Mr. Trevelyan should wake up next morning to find things thus—Barclay dead, the promise not kept, the longed-for words not spoken, all through Jean's refusal, and all a part of the irrevocable past!

Jean shuddered, with a sick dread, at the thought of his look.

Yet she could have done it, could have dared all, had she felt sure she would be doing rightly. But that she could not feel. She pictured herself, for one moment in Barclay's place! Then came another question, "If CHRIST were here, would HE hold back?"

"Father," she said quietly.

He did not move.

"Father!"

"Jean! Yes."

"I don't quite know what to do."

"Something happened? Yes—tell me."

He was wide awake in a moment.

"A man up the gorge is ill—and he has sent. Don't you think we can ask Jem to go?"

"Wants me?"

"Smithson has brought the message."

"Who is it?"

"Barclay. He is very ill—dying."

"And he has sent for me?"

"You can't go. It is impossible!" That side of the matter was all Jean could see now. The responsibility lay with her father since she had called him, and she would do all in her power to keep him back. "You can't go. It is so cold and wet—a dreadful evening—and you are not well enough."

"I can't help that. Run, my dear. I shall be ready in a few minutes."

"If it were anywhere else—where you could drive! But up the gorge—"

"Yes. Is Smithson still here? Tell him to wait for me. I shall be glad of his arm, going uphill. You don't know what is wrong with Barclay?"

"It is an acute attack—something internal, I fancy. Mr. Evans has seen him, and says nothing can be done. He is in great pain."

"Run away, my dear."

"Father, you don't think—if I were to go to the cottage with Smithson, and tell him Jem would come? The gardener could go for Jem."

"You need not be afraid. A man can always do his duty. I will wrap up well, and take all precautions. Make me a cup of hot coffee, if you like—and give Smithson some too."

Jean retreated, with a terrible weight at her heart; ran down to speak to Smithson; ordered the coffee; then rushed upstairs to don hat and ulster. But disappointment awaited her. When Mr. Trevelyan appeared, a negative movement of his head greeted the outdoor apparel.

"No, Jean."

"I am coming, of course?"—desperately.

"No; it is unnecessary. You have had a great deal to do lately, and you are tired—" which was true, though Jean imagined he had not seen it. "You can do no possible good by coming; and I don't wish you to be there . . . It is practically almost a one-roomed cottage—every sound heard. Stay at home, and keep up good fires."

"You needn't be afraid, Miss," put in Smithson. "I'll see him home safe—I promise you."

"You will not let my father come back alone?"

"No, Miss Trevelyan, I won't! Not if it's ever so!"

Jean was fain to submit. She knew from her father's face, the uselessness of further protest.

He drank his coffee, allowed her to put his comforter over his mouth, gave a little parting smile of encouragement, and was off.

Jean followed him to the front door, where the cold chill of the almost freezing fog struck them as with an invisible hand. Then she was ordered back; but not before the thought came—what would the gorge be like, on such an evening? For herself, she would have thought nothing of it; but for Mr. Trevelyan—!

Jean took off her walking things, and resolutely returned to the Parish accounts, putting from her as far as possible the fears which sought to obtain dominion.

She had wanted a quiet hour, and now she had it. The Parish accounts were gainers thereby; but at the hour's end, Jean could do no more. Even her self-mastery for once failed under the strain. She could neither work nor read, but could only walk to and fro, restlessly questioning with herself; one moment bitterly regretting her own action; the next, feeling that if all should come over again, no other decision would be possible. She knew well that, if she had not called her father, she would be quite as unhappy now from the opposite cause.

Another ring—this time at the front door—and James Trevelyan walked in.

"Jem, if you had only come an hour ago!" was his unexpected greeting.

"Why, Jean! You are as pale as a ghost."

"My father has been so unwell to-day; and he has gone up the gorge."

"Whew! Nice afternoon!"

Jem held two cold hands to the fire, and examined Jean with kind eyes. He had rarely seen her so troubled. She grew whiter as she told him what had passed, and sought his face sorrowfully for an opinion.

"What do you think? Was I right? Could I do anything else?"

"You had hardly a right to decide for your father. I wish he had not felt obliged to go."

"He promised, you know! Not that that makes much difference. He would have gone anyhow. But if it should make him worse—Jem, shall I have done wrongly?"

"Questions of right and wrong don't hinge upon consequences."

"You would have done the same in my place?"

"Can't be sure. I might not have had the courage."

"I almost thought I hadn't the courage not to call him."

"Would it not have been easier to face his displeasure than to risk doing him harm? Be just to yourself, Jean."

Jean smiled. "I see," she said. "Yes—then it really was conscience. One gets so puzzled . . . And to have to settle

in such a hurry—not able to see ahead . . . Did you come on business?"

"Nothing pressing. It can wait till another day. I wanted to know how your father was."

He debated silently how soon to go after Mr. Trevelyan; a step already resolved on. Jean had looked so forlorn when he entered, that he would not at once leave her.

"I should have sent for you, if only I could have felt sure—
But if Barclay had died meantime—"

"Yes; I can hardly think you would have been justified."

"I am glad you think so," with a more restful look. After a break, she resumed, "I was telling you, the other day, all about Barclay—the sort of life his has been. I wanted to ask you a question; only we were interrupted. It puzzles me sometimes how a man like that—brought up as he was—how he can help being what he is . . . I mean—can he help it? . . . If he has inherited all sorts of evil ways—and if all his associations were so bad—things he could not alter—doesn't it seem as if he must have grown into his present shape, without any choice of his own? And if that is true, how can he be responsible for it?"

"No man is responsible for what he cannot help."

"Or for its results—"

"Or for results; so far as he has been absolutely powerless to prevent those results."

"If Barclay had had a different home and education, he would have turned out differently, of course."

"To some extent, yes—either better or worse. You and I cannot judge how far he might, if he would, have changed his associations—or resisted them. We don't know where he has or has not deliberately yielded to evil."

"But isn't yielding or resisting a matter of will? And isn't will inherited?"

"Yes—partly, no doubt. The natural will may be strong or weak; and it becomes stronger or weaker through training."

"And if a man's will is paralysed—?"

"I doubt if any sane man's will is paralysed. Most people have will enough to do what they like. Apparent paralysis is commonly shown only in apparent powerlessness to do what they don't like."

"But if the will is what it is, through heredity and training—" pronounced Jean slowly—"and if a man can't control either the heredity or the training—then I don't see how he can help being what he is?"

"Not badly put, for a one-sided view of the question. But you must take care not to lose sight of the other side—the absolute freedom of the will—its God-given freedom. No man living can be forced into evil. It is a matter of inducement, not of force. The will sways right or left, according to the strength of the inducements offered—inducements to self-pleasing on the one hand, inducements to right-doing on the other hand."

"That brings one again to a man's surroundings. But suppose Barclay's surroundings have been all bad? Suppose he has never once had the strong-enough inducement to do right?"

"Jean, are you trying to climb upon the judgment-seat?" asked Jem, in a quiet low voice; and a flush rose to her face. "No wonder your task proves puzzling! Omniscient Eyes are needed there to discriminate—to award due praise or blame. I suppose there is nothing in which we blunder more fearfully."

"Then one ought not to look into the question?"

"Look into it as an abstract question, if you like; but don't try to judge. Leave individual cases alone. The matter is in wiser and more loving Hands than ours . . . And be very sure of one thing—that no lawful excuse exists for Barclay, which will not, by-and-by, be taken into account. Every possible excuse will be made—every difficult circumstance and hardening influence will be allowed for. He will not be expected to have done what he could not do; but only to have done what he could do;—heredity, training, weak will, and aught else, fully considered . . . Do you really think that HE Who made the man doesn't know and understand all this far better than you and I can do? Be reasonable, Jean!"

Jean's "Thank you!" was full of thought.

"Nothing is easier than to get into a tangle of perplexity—looking through our limited peep-holes. You may dwell upon heredity, and all that it entails, until you look upon a man as a mere agglomeration of inherited molecules, unable to move hand or foot, voice or will, except in obedience to inherited proclivities. Or you may dwell upon training and its results, until you look upon a man as a mere lump of dough, pounded and rolled into a permanent shape, from which he can never depart. But these are one-sided views. Heredity has enormous influence. Training has immense power. Nevertheless, through all, a man's will is free; and for his actions, he is and must be accountable . . . After all,

few men are ready to carry out these pretty theories to their legitimate end. If a thief comes, and makes away with the plate, we don't say pityingly, 'Poor fellow! He can't help it! He was obliged to act so! All the result of the bias he has inherited from his father, and the want of a sufficient inducement to be honest!' We treat him like a rational being, with a will of his own, and clap him into prison. Thereby, no doubt, supplying an inducement for the future."

Jem was glad to have made Jean laugh.

"Follow out that line of thought for yourself," he said, rising. "Now, it is unsociable to run away so soon; but don't you think I had better meet your father?"

"O Jem! Will you? How kind!"

"We shall soon be back, I dare say." As Jem was putting on his great-coat, he said with rather an odd intonation—

"Cyril seems greatly taken with these Lucases! Is it—the father—the mother—or—?"

"I don't know," Jean answered, startled less by the question than by a sudden pulse of feeling through her own frame. "I have not called yet."

"I have. The daughter is a nice little girl. Not quite desirable for Cyril, though."

"Oh, I should not think—" and a pause. "Yes, he is always going there. But I thought it was Captain Lucas."

"Perhaps you are right. I hope so. Good-bye for the moment."

Jean went slowly back to the drawing-room, thinking—not of her father, but of Cyril. "Can it be?" she asked. "Cyril—to marry Miss Lucas! Why didn't I see before?"

She tried to laugh, then threw herself back in an easy-chair; an unwonted action for Jean, little given to lounging.

"Oh, how tired I am! I shouldn't have been half so tired if I had gone up gorge! . . . Cyril to do—that! But why not? . . . Cyril!"

She heard herself sigh, as she might have heard another person sigh.

"Well—why not? After all, why not? If it will make him happy!"

Nine o'clock struck before feet sounded on the gravel-walk; and Jean hastened out to open the door. Mr. Trevelyan came in slowly, leaning on Jem's arm.

"He's rather done!" Jem said cheerily. "But all right, now we are back. The study, Jean—and he shall have some hot brandy and water at once. No, I know he doesn't take stimulants commonly; but to-night he must! We'll do our best to keep out the chill. Smithson came half-way, and then I sent him back."

Mr. Trevelyan did not speak till divested of his damp cloak, and placed in his big chair near the blazing fire.

"This is nice," he tried to say, and the words were almost too hoarse to be intelligible. "Fog—got into my throat," he added with a smile.

"Father, were you in time?" asked Jean, as Jem went off for the remedy he advised.

"Nearly an hour. He was past saying much—great pain—but he listened—and I think he understood. I am glad you were not there. The suffering was terrible."

"And—then—?" in a low voice.

The answer came almost like an echo of what Jem had said

—

"My dear, we can only leave him now—in just and merciful Hands . . . ONE who knows all about him—better than you or I! . . . But I would not for worlds not have gone."

Jean laid a hand on his, and it received warm pressure. Whatever the consequences might be, she felt at the moment that she had acted rightly.

CHAPTER X.

CONFIDENTIAL WITH THE DOCTOR.

"Far more numerous was the herd of such,
Who think too little, and who talk too much."

DRYDEN.

"I shall die if I don't talk."

REYNOLDS.

"THE world's in a queer state, Dr. Ingram," Mrs. Kennedy remarked one January afternoon. "Uncomfortable, don't you know?"

She spoke in a contemplative tone, lounging forward, while a loose tail of hair obtruded itself from beneath a not too tidy cap, and her placid gaze was riveted on the Doctor's face. He had been summoned to prescribe for Dicky something which should counteract a too unrestricted course of Christmas plum-cake and "sweeties." The Kennedy children were not trained to habits of self-control in minor matters.

It was three o'clock, and the Doctor had a long list of visits still to pay; yet he could not at once escape. Mrs. Kennedy, though minus the possession of a "glittering eye," like that of the Ancient Mariner, held him with such eyes as she had, refusing to see his anxiety to be off.

"Generally is!" responded her companion.

He was in appearance not at all the stereotyped doctor of novels. He was neither little nor bustling; and he did not jerk out a succession of medical phrases, to mystify the invalid's relations. Professionally, indeed, he was given to saying a very small amount—some complained, a too small amount—and what he did utter was rarely couched in learned language. Of medium height, not too substantial, yet not thin, he had reserved manners, which covered a gentle and sympathetic disposition. His prevailing expression was serious, but a substratum of humour

occasionally reached the surface, through superimposed strata of a more solid kind.

Mrs. Kennedy's chief confidante was the Doctor's oldest daughter, Mabel; but she had not the least objection to confide in the Doctor himself, when opportunity offered.

"Uncomfortable, don't you think?" she repeated meditatively. "Everything going cranky, you know. And something ought to be done."

"To set the world right?"

"Well, but I mean, of course, our particular world. Dulveriford, don't you know? I'm not talking about all sorts of out of the world Tropics of Capricorns and longitudes and things," said Mrs. Kennedy, with a vague recollection of Dicky's last geography lesson before Christmas.

"Feejee Islanders are all very well—I dare say they'll learn by-and-by quite to shine in society, don't you know?—Now they've left off eating everybody. And as for Madagascar, and Zulu-Land, and that other place—what is the name?—Alaska—I should be as glad as anything, if they could just have all the beads and blankets they want, poor dear things! We have our working party once a fortnight, you know—what Mabel calls 'The Timbuctoo Thimble'—and then, of course, we think about those sort of creatures. At least, we try to, I'm sure, though we do sometimes talk about Mrs. Villiers' last new bonnet, don't you know?"

"And we read reports about them—quite properly! Because my husband doesn't think we ought to read a story. I think it might make folks work a little faster; but you know you never can get a man to see what he doesn't see, when he won't see it!—And he says it isn't suitable. And to be sure we're not working for fictitious savages! But then everybody

yawns, and everybody else catches it and yawns too; and nobody can do a nice hem when they're yawning, so we have to stop reading and do a little talk instead . . . Still, you know, all that can't be like home affairs!"

"And though I'm not so very desperately fond of Jean Trevelyan in a general way—She's got a shut-up sort of manner, you know, and all that—! And of course her father and my husband are on different lines. I don't know why they shouldn't be, either—" reflectively—"but I suppose it isn't in man-nature to think that anybody or another line can possibly be right. And so—don't you see?—That's how it is! But Jean really is a nice girl, I'm sure—and all these weeks I've been so awfully sorry for the poor dear! I haven't liked to go and bother her through the worst of the time—but now he's getting a little bit of a scrap better, I thought I would just ask you—privately, don't you know?—If I could be of any sort of use?"

Dr. Ingram's listening face relaxed slightly. Then this was not all pure chatter.

"Of course, Jean has her own friends," pursued Mrs. Kennedy, allowing no space for an answer. "Any number of them. There's Mrs. Trevelyan—only she has been shut-up for a month with influenza. And there's Mrs. Villiers—but I shouldn't think she knew hardly as much about nursing as my Dicky. She always looks as if she was meant to be draperied like a Greek statue, don't you know?—With her hands nicely arranged, so as to show off the wrists. That funny creature, Miss Moggridge, has been backwards and forwards every day, I'm told, but—What did you say? Oh, it doesn't matter what I say to you, Dr. Ingram! You're like Mabel! You never make mischief. And everybody thinks Miss Moggridge queer."

"I'm afraid—" said Dr. Ingram, looking at the clock.

"I can't endure the woman, for my part. She's got such a way of setting herself upon a turret, as if nobody else in the world ever had a kind thought. Every one's narrow, and bitter, and wicked, and disagreeable, except Miss Moggridge. And the way she abuses good people who don't think like her—! Well, of course they're narrow, poor dears—and how can they help it? I suppose they were made so; or at least they've grown into it. Some people are born wide, and some are born narrow. And I don't really see, for my part, that it's a bit prettier or more Christian, for the broad-minded folks to abuse the narrow because they're not broad, don't you know, than it is for the narrow to abuse the broad, because they're not narrow, don't you see? Of course, nobody ever calls themselves narrow. They only say, they're all right, and everybody else is wrong who doesn't think like them. And that's what Miss Moggridge does—so where's the difference? . . . But I didn't mean to get upon Miss Moggridge. I wanted to ask you about Mr. Trevelyan."

Dr. Ingram hated to be questioned about his patients. He immediately stood up.

"You're not going yet, you know," asserted Mrs. Kennedy, keeping her seat. "My mind's all in a scrummage, and I want putting straight. And I want to know first about Jean . . . Of course, it's horrid for her, because she had to do what brought on this illness. At least she thought she had to do it. Yes, of course I've heard all about that—everybody has heard it, and they all say it's just like Jean. Anybody else wouldn't have called him. I wouldn't—not for any mortal man living! Now do tell me—is Mr. Trevelyan going on well, and could I do anything?"

"You can call and ask Jean yourself. She is much overtaxed."

"I should think so—all these weeks of nursing! She won't care to see me, not a scrap! So what's the good of my going? Jean never did like me, and I don't see why she should. It isn't opinions. People can like one another, without thinking just identically the same about every single thing that ever was heard of. But we don't suit somehow! Only if I could be of any use? You can ask her for me. I shan't go unless I'm sent for."

After this positive assertion, nobody at all acquainted with Mrs. Kennedy need have been surprised that within half-an-hour she was on her way to Dulveriford Rectory.

Jean came to see her when summoned. Her father was asleep, she said; and one of the maids would keep watch for a few minutes. Had Mrs. Kennedy come on business? Jean looked pale and thin, with the stress of long nursing and suspense, through her father's complicated and dangerous illness. She had an air of rigid composure, as she rang for tea, and sat down to answer Mrs. Kennedy's questions.

Yes; her father was better; really better, and on the whole out of danger. At least Dr. Ingram hoped so. Recovery would be slow, of course; it could not be otherwise; and great care would be needed. There must be no thought of work at present—probably not for months. Dr. Ingram talked of a year's rest. The strain had been kept up far too long. Nothing was settled yet, but Dr. Ingram wished him very much to go for a voyage—perhaps to the Cape, or perhaps to Australia.

"My dear, I'm most dreadfully sorry! But you would go with him, of course?"

"No; it would cost too much. One has not to think of oneself," said Jean with a forced smile. "If it is necessary for him—Yes; I suppose we shall have to get a locum tenens. He could not start for another three or four weeks; and Mr. Marson, who is helping now, can stay a little longer . . . Oh, there is no difficulty about me. Jem Trevelyan and his mother will take me in . . . Yes, my father knows—and of course he will do what is right. I am only so thankful that he is better. It might have been!"

Jean counted her own self-command inviolable; but she was not prepared to be taken into a large sympathetic embrace; to have motherly kisses on her cheek; and to hear a motherly voice saying, "You poor dear child! I am, so sorry."

Jean broke into one irresistible sob, and a few hot tears fell in quick succession; but she struggled back to composure, and gently released herself—not without a sense of comfort.

"Thank you very much: you are very good," she said. "But of course I do not mean to be selfish. If he will only come home strong, it will be all right. May I give you a cup of tea? I am afraid I ought to go upstairs soon."

"I never quite knew before what nice feeling there is in Jean," murmured Mrs. Kennedy as she trudged homeward. "Really, she isn't half so stiff and shut-up when one gets to know her; and she does seem so fond of her father. Perhaps even he isn't always so starched as he seems sometimes!
—"

At almost the same moment, a somewhat similar thought passed through Jean's mind: "How much pleasanter Mrs. Kennedy is than I have always fancied!"

But neither could hear the other.

Passing through Dutton, Mrs. Kennedy turned aside near the Post-Office, into a side street, where was a greengrocer's, opposite a red house. Mrs. Kennedy had taken to patronising this greengrocer of late from economical motives. She gave an order for the morrow, and walked out in time to see an active figure run up the steps of the red house, turn the handle of the front door, and enter.

"If that isn't Sir Cyril himself!" ejaculated Mrs. Kennedy under her breath. "And as much at home as if—! Something is in the air—that's certain! Poor dear Miss Devereux."

Of course Mrs. Kennedy knew all about the Lucases, since family secrets were apt to ooze out in Dutton. She wisely kept her own counsel, however, when she went home, and said nothing—even to her husband. Through sheer forgetfulness and absence of mind, he was apt to repeat things which had no business to be repeated; and his wife had learned through dire experience that silence is sometimes the better form of discretion. Whether her reticence would have survived a tête-à-tête with Mabel Ingram may be doubted; but Mabel was from home. So Mrs. Kennedy conjectured, and was mute.

She had made no mistake. It really was Sir Cyril Devereux, who had run up the stone steps, and had entered lightly without ringing.

He had been to the red house very often of late, oftener than he realised. During the short period of convalescence after his accident, he had paid many and lengthy calls on the Lucases. Then came the break of his last term at Oxford. And before Christmas, he returned home "for

good," a gentleman at large, with a comfortable property and plenty of interests, but no definite line of work in life.

The property was large enough to require attention, but by no means so extensive as to absorb the whole of a young man's energies. Many beside Lady Lucas had earnestly advised Sybella to provide some definite line for Cyril, during at least the earlier years of his manhood; but she had refused to see the need.

"He could take up anything he liked," she said; "but he would, have plenty of money. For her part, she didn't see why he need slave; and she was sure his health would not stand hard work; and he might just as well live comfortably at home with her! He could find plenty to do in Dulveriford."

Cyril had not opposed this view of the question. He was vaguely desirous to make a "career" for himself somehow; but he had not decided on the manner of that career. He seemed to have no special bent beyond a general love of art, and literature; and since, from a money point of view, there was no hurry, he resolved to wait. Something would turn up, sooner or later.

Meanwhile, his friends found consolation in the fact that at least he was not disposed to idleness. He read a fair amount, studied popular questions, looked into business matters, went in for abundance of pedestrian and equestrian exercise, and contrived on the whole to fill up his time creditably. Sometimes he talked of setting up a hunter, and sometimes he planned writing a book; but he had no great passion either for hunting or penmanship. Sybella's horror of guns had hitherto rather stood in the way of shooting, except when he was away from home. Her horror of cigars was less inconvenient, since, though not much addicted to smoking as a habit, he could always retreat to

his den, when desirous to escape from her talk or her temper.

In a general way, Cyril would have spent many a spare hour at Dulveriford Rectory; but on his return before Christmas, he found Jean still so entirely occupied in attendance on her father, as to be rarely visible. As he could not have Jean, he went in for Emmie Lucas.

He did not yet know his own mind about the two girls—though not from any lack of self-watching—and he was drifting fast to a position where he would be likely to act as if he did know it.

Emmie's dark face, small and rosy and sweet, was gaining more and more a hold upon him. She was not aware of the fact herself, being very young, unversed in the ways of the world, and kitten-like in simplicity. She would chat and laugh with Sir Cyril, as easily as if she had been his sister, delighted always to see him, because her father had so few friends. But naturally, Cyril did not ascribe this delight to thoughtfulness for her father—though he still kept up the little fiction of coming perpetually to call upon Captain Lucas. If Captain Lucas were out or busy, it was a matter of course that he should stay for a talk with the ladies.

As already intimated, Cyril did not drift unknowingly. He was too much given to self-analysing not to see whither his barque floated. Sometimes he grew uneasy, and thought he would not call on the Lucases for a few days; which "few days" seldom extended themselves beyond two nights. Sometimes he felt a desperate inclination to break through everything, to get utterly away from Dulveriford for a year or two years.

Why not? He had no binding duties at home; or anywhere else, unfortunately. He had pottered abut a good deal in Swiss and German hotels with Miss Devereux; but a wide world unexplored lay beyond. Why not take a more extended tour—say to the Antipodes—in search of a vocation, or at least to see what the effect of separation might be on himself and others? There was money enough; and "aunt Sybella" could remain in charge at the Brow.

But these were evening and night thoughts chiefly. He said nothing about them in the daytime.

Indeed, he seldom spoke of his friends, the Lucases, before Miss Devereux; and she had as yet not the slightest idea how far things had gone. Cyril had quite made up his mind to do nothing hasty; to be drawn into no rash or ill-considered step. He would see his way, clear as daylight, before he would commit himself. Satisfied with this resolution, he went on calling at the red house.

CHAPTER XI.

ON THE ROCKS.

"It is done! I have told her I love her!



"Some power grown tyrannous holding me fast,
Blotting alike the Future and Past."

L. MORRIS.

AFTER the evening call, witnessed by Mrs. Kennedy, Cyril did not go again for three whole days. He really was unable, being prevented by a close run of engagements: but none the less he was much gratified with his own self-control in staying away.

Emmie's little face haunted him incessantly, and after three days, he could wait no longer. The Dulveriford world was a wilderness without her smile. Friends came to lunch, and more friends were expected to afternoon tea; and Sybella always liked to air her nephew's manners on these occasions. But Cyril, pleading business, slipped away soon after three o'clock.

"Of course it is business," he told himself laughingly. "Much more business than sitting indoors to talk chit-chat with a lot of old maids. The most important business of life, perhaps."

He had not so plainly allowed the possibility to himself before; but under the pull of three days' starvation of Emmie, it sprang up and took clear shape.

Nobody was in the drawing-room of the red house when he entered, and the fire had sunk into a mere heap of red embers—an unusual state of things there at four o'clock. Cyril wondered what could have happened to banish the three. They walked earlier, as a rule, these wintry days; and engagements out to tea were rare.

Cyril endeavoured to warm his hands before the dull coals, and considered whether he might count himself enough at home to make up the fire, but did not do it. Then he strolled about, criticised one or two of the old pictures, and finally was rewarded by Emmie's appearance.

She did not see him at first. Her eyes were downcast, the dark lashes almost resting on the rounded cheeks, and as she came slowly in with a lagging step, she said, "O dear me!" half aloud.

"How do you do?" asked Cyril.

Emmie's movement might have been the result of an electric shock, and the dark eyes opened wide.

"Oh—I didn't see," she said in an embarrassed voice. "I—I beg your pardon. Won't you sit down? I'll call my mother—if—if she can come—"

"No, no, don't disturb her on any account. Pray don't. I dare say she has lots of things to do."

"She has—she is—rather busy," faltered Emmie, and a look of sorrowful trouble came to the sweet lips. "Oh, it is only—she would come, if—"

"I dare say she will look in presently; but don't call her. I only want to know how you are all getting on. The last three days have been so full, I couldn't find a minute. How is your father?"

"He—" Emmie shivered.

"Will you let me make up the fire? You are cold."

"Oh, no—I—"

Emmie knelt down on the rug, and poked vaguely at the red embers; whereupon Cyril bent over her, took the poker out of her hand which he found to be trembling, arranged the fading coals in a scientific fashion, and placed a few fresh pieces lightly one upon another. A flame sprang up as by magic. Then he laid hold upon those trembling little hands, lifted Emmie up, and placed her in the big arm-chair. She submitted as a child might have done, and sat where he put her, not crying as she would have cried for some minor matter, but with her mouth set in a sorrowful curve, and her eyes gazing into some unknown grief. The colour in her cheeks was much deeper than usual—a rich crimson-velvet tint—and the brow looked whiter, the eyes darker by contrast. Cyril had never seen her thus. His feelings were greatly stirred.

"I'm afraid you have been worried by something," he said sympathizingly.

Emmie gave him a pathetic smile. "I suppose one has to be worried sometimes," she said.

"And it's nothing I can help you in?"

"O no—thanks—"

"I would if I could. I would, really. You believe that—don't you, Emmie?"

This was going on fast, much faster than he had meant to go. The pathos and tender sorrow of her face were too much for him, and wise resolutions were forgotten. He had never called her "Emmie" before; and she scarcely seemed to notice it, she was so full of her trouble. There was the sound of a quivering sigh, and Cyril again took her hand.

"Emmie, don't you think you could let me help you? Couldn't you manage to look on me as something more than a mere friend . . . Yes, I mean it," as she turned wondering eyes upon him; eyes so soft and sad that he was carried away by their glance into a rush of pity and affectionate concern. He had no time to analyse his own feelings, to dissect the make of his sensations. Before he knew what would come next, he was saying with pleading earnestness—

"Emmie, I love you! I love you, darling! Can you love me? Will you promise to be my wife?"

"It is so kind of you," said Emmie wistfully. Then she sat up, and drew her hand away from his with an instinctive movement, yet she repeated, "It is so very kind of you."

"Not 'kind,' Emmie. This is not 'kindness.' It is something so much more. I don't think you understand."

"Yes—O I think I do. But I didn't know what you were going to say. It seems so—so strange! And—my mother—"

"Would your mother object? Would she mind?"

"I don't know. O she couldn't—couldn't mind!" with a gasp. "She would only—She would wish—She likes you so much —"

"And you—you like me just a little too?"

"Yes. I like you—very much indeed," declared Emmie, her face crimson and her breath quick. "Of course I do. Yes—Only—But Miss Devereux—"

"Miss Devereux has no real control over me. It all rests with you! If you can say 'Yes'—"

"Oh, I don't know!" Some fresh thought seemed to come up, and she shivered, though her cheeks were on fire. "I don't know! Oh, I don't know."

Did she not know how much she cared for him?—Or whether she loved him? Was that it? The poor little hands tried to cover the burning face. "I don't know! I don't know!" was all she seemed able to utter.

"You mean—perhaps—Is it because of your own home troubles, Emmie? But if I am willing—? Darling, if I want to give you a happy home—?"

"I must go to my mother!" and Emmie started up. "Please, please don't say any more now. Please let me! . . . Yes, I know—it is so good of you—"

She had almost said childishly, "So good of you to think of it!" but checked herself in time. "Only, please, I must tell my mother. I want to tell her first. Don't ask me to say any more to-day, please!"

"To-morrow—then—"

"The day after to-morrow—please. I'll write."

"You want to get used to the idea!" Cyril smiled down on her, having little doubt how things would end. He knew himself to be an attractive young fellow, good-looking and gentlemanly; and he knew Emmie liked him; and he could not but be aware of the social advantages which he was offering. "Well—just two days! But you will have pity on my suspense."

"Oh—yes!"

Emmie fled; and Cyril stood alone, a consciousness already creeping over him that he had run on faster than he had intended. For some time past, he had seen this lying ahead, not as a thing certain, but as a thing probable. Still, he had not meant to bind himself so soon.

And now the deed was done!

Cyril tried to believe that it was best so—that decisive action was better than hesitancy and delay. After all, he would no doubt have reached the same goal in the end! Why not in the beginning? Now he knew what lay before him. Emmie had not yet accepted his offer, it was true; but who could doubt what her answer would be? Not Cyril at all events. He smiled over the recollection of her face; and then he smiled again to think how happy he would make her at the Brow. Sweet dark-eyed Emmie! Dear little rosy-checked Emmie! She should have a life as free from care as a devoted husband could render it.

There was "aunt Sybella!" But, of course, aunt Sybella would conform to his wishes. Aunt Sybella was not mistress of his house, whatever she might think. When Emmie was mistress, aunt Sybella would have to abdicate. Moreover, he was not going to have his gentle Emmie's life embittered by domestic broils. Aunt Sybella would have to make herself agreeable to Sir Cyril's wife, or she would have to find a home elsewhere.

His Emmie! His wife! It had come to that!

He almost thought Mrs. Lucas would walk in directly, to tell him how delighted she was, and how gladly she would accept him as her son. But she did not; and after waiting a good ten minutes, Cyril decided to leave. After all, Emmie

had given him his congé for the moment; and the mother and daughter would want a quiet hour together.

Opening the door, he was arrested by an unexpected sight—a sight no less terrible than unexpected. Captain Lucas, with vacant eyes and deeply-flushed face, was staggering across the hall, swaying heavily from side to side, while his wife, pale as death, endeavoured to hold him up, and to guide his uncertain steps.

Overcome again!

Cyril understood in a moment. He knew now what Emmie's trouble had been; and a throb of anger passed through him. Why had she not told all before he spoke? He did not step forward or show himself. Better to leave the poor wife to manage her hard task alone, than to appear as spectator of her shame.

Happily, the drawing-room door had made no noise as it opened, and Cyril was well in the shade. He stood perfectly still, and the two disappeared within the study—Captain Lucas giving another great lurch, then breaking into a rollicking fragment of song. They did not see Cyril. But the sense of sick disgust which swept over him can hardly be described. That his future father-in-law!

Cyril fled from the house, as Emmie had fled from him. His rapid escape can be told in no other words. He felt that he could not breathe till he was outside in the street. Then, dark and dull and wintry as it was, he started off at a furious pace through Dutton, along the nearest country road, and away to the marshlands, where as a boy he had loved to wander with Jean.

The marshes were hardly what anybody in his sober senses would have chosen for a January stroll after sundown; but

Cyril could scarcely be termed in his sober senses just then. From quiet satisfaction and complacent pleasure in himself and Emmie, he had leaped at one bound, by an instantaneous transition, into a very tumult of disordered feeling and tempestuous thought.

He had done it now!—And done it himself! Nobody else had brought him into this coil. Nobody could get him out of it!

Why needed he to be so startled by the sight? Had he not known the whole before? Had he not pitied the man's weakness, heartily sympathising with the wife and child? Had not his first wish been, in asking Emmie, to save her from the pressure of that family sorrow? All the while, he had known that this might happen again—that any day Captain Lucas might be vanquished.

He had known, but he had not realised. Kind friendliness and sympathy from him to them had been pleasant to give. But—he, Sir Cyril Devereux, to have for father-in-law a man who might at any time drown his senses in drink from sheer infirmity of purpose! His father-in-law to be seen perhaps rolling helplessly through Dutton, the finger of scorn pointed at him from every side! Cyril's benevolence snapped under the pull of this test.

If he loved Emmie—there lay the balancing-pull. Like a half drowned man catching at a straw, as he strode over the muddy marshland, Cyril turned to the thought of Emmie's little face, soft and dark, rosy and childlike, as it had haunted him of late.

Strange! He could not so much as see it! Emmie's face refused to rise at his bidding. Instead, Jean's pale and even features came between, the calm eyes looking at him reproachfully.

Cyril stopped short in his wild walk. The soft ground yielded under his boots, and the wet fog wrapped him round in a damp embrace; but he heeded neither. That moment was to him as a "soul's awakening;" an awakening full of pain, and into darkness. For he knew that it had come too late.

He had proposed to Emmie Lucas. Emmie would accept him. He had cut himself off for life from Jean.

For life!

Like a stab from a spear this thought came, rending away all disguises, showing him his own state, his own true self . . . Emmie Lucas! What was Emmie Lucas to him compared with Jean . . . A dear little girl; sweet and charming! . . . But Jean!—He had grown-up into a close union with Jean. His whole being was twined in and out with Jean's being. To be cut off from Jean! How could he endure it?

Had he been mad? Was his seeming love for Emmie all a delusion? It wavered, flickered, went out, this hour, in the rush of his old passionate devotion to Jean. He felt that he could live for Jean, could die for Jean, could wait any number of years for Jean—if only he might hope to win her in the end. But to be cut off from her utterly! And by his own action!

And all these weeks past he had honestly counted himself in love with Emmie Lucas.

"Emmie!" he laughed aloud, out on the dreary marshland.
"O Jean! What an utter fool I have been!"

He could not yet turn homeward. To meet Miss Devereux's shallow curiosity and shallower solicitude, at the dinner-table, would be insupportable. He knew that he had not control of his own face. She would guess something to have

happened out of the common, and would pester him with looks and questions. So he went on and on, thinking hard while trying not to think, going over the past, reckoning up the innumerable points at which his life had been interlaced with Jean's, finding out how necessary to him she always had been, always would be!

And to have discovered this, just too late!

If only he had not spoken that day! But then, would the awakening love have come?

He tried again and again to think of Emmie, to picture her confiding ways, to imagine the sweet little face at the head of his table, always by his side! In vain! Every fresh effort was a failure. Jean's face persistently rose instead, blotting out Emmie's.

Without any clear aim before his mind's eye—which indeed was fully occupied—he presently turned aside from the marshes, and made his way towards Dulveriford Rectory. He had no idea of going in or of speaking to Jean. He only went because he could not help it.

The drawing-room blinds were not drawn when he entered the garden; and he stole near, cautiously as a thief might have stolen. He was veiled in the outside darkness; while a lamp and a bright fire burnt within. Jean stood by the table, reading a letter—pale and quiet. She looked up carelessly towards the window, little thinking that Cyril was so near. Then she read a few more lines, and again looked up, as if with an uneasy consciousness of being watched. She might well feel the intense gaze which Cyril brought to bear upon her. He was conscious of power to make her feel it; and the consciousness caused a gleam of delight.

Jean stepped forward, and drew down the blind. That was at an end; and Cyril's momentary delight faded into wretchedness.

He dared not go in. He could not trust himself. She would see his trouble in his face; and there was no knowing what he might be drawn on to say. Cyril had force of will to resist the loadstone pulling, and to walk away.

Miss Devereux was offended that her nephew had not come home in time for dinner; and when he did appear, she greeted him with reproaches. It was of no consequence, of course—at least, of course she was of no consequence—but she thought he might have the civility to tell her beforehand when he meant to stay away—even though he was master of the Brow, and poor she was nobody—still she did think she had a right to be treated with at least a little proper respect.

When a man is stretched on the rack, an additional turn of the screws becomes sometimes just too much for endurance. He may have borne in silence thus far; but there is a point where silence breaks down. Cyril was on the rack, and his powers of endurance had reached their limit. One turn more became too much.

This evening's experience had changed him greatly, working in him such a revolution of thought and feeling as years are commonly needed to work. He had gone out after three o'clock, a pleasant boyish young fellow, drifting easily on life's current, well content with himself and the world in general. He had come back at eight o'clock a full-grown man; a sufferer through his own blundering haste; sharply

awakened from placid satisfaction to a new knowledge of himself, a fresh understanding of life.

Had Miss Devereux been on the look-out, she must have noticed the change in his face, the tense misery of every feature; but as usual she was occupied with herself. The falling of a thunderbolt could hardly have startled her more than did his rough reply, putting down her querulous complaints with a disdain which he had never shown to her yet. She stared, protested, then collapsed into tears; and Cyril flung himself into an easy-chair.

"There! I didn't mean to put you out," he said moodily. "But what's the use of bothering one?"

"You'll take—take—some din—dinner?" sobbed Sybella.

"No, thanks. I only want a glass of wine and some biscuits . . . And I am tired, so I shall go to bed early—after a cigar."

"I'm sure somebody must have done something, or else you are in some dreadful scrape and won't confess it," wept Sybella. "You are not in the least like yourself."

Cyril made his escape. He could stand no questioning. The night which followed was one long torture of waking and sleeping dreams—Jean's face always prominent.

CHAPTER XII.

TAKING COUNSEL.

"It was not her time to love; beside
Her life had many a hope and aim."

R. BROWNING.

CAPTAIN LUCAS was in the depths of despair next morning. It was always thus, after these disappointing failures; but never more thus than now. The breakdown had been so unexpected. After a year and more of continuous victory, he had felt himself secure; it seemed almost absurd to fear that he ever could be overcome again. And in a moment, the shock of temptation had come—the opportunity, the craving, the powerlessness to resist.

Scarcely an hour before Sir Cyril's call, he had been helped, staggering, home by a policeman; and thereafter, Mrs. Lucas would not leave his side. Emmie had no chance of a talk with her that evening; and next morning was no better. It was well that she had not promised an immediate reply.

Captain Lucas was himself again after a night's sleep; but in an abyss of conscious degradation and hopelessness, ready to weep like a child. Nothing was of any use, he moaned. No good to try any longer. It could not be overcome. He had better give in, once for all, and let things go. He would get away somewhere out of everybody's reach. He was only spoiling their lives—his wife's and Emmie's—and the sooner they parted the better.

His wife smiled faintly. She might have told him that her life was pretty well spoilt already, viewed from the ordinary standpoint—but that she loved her husband, and had the great joy to look forward to, of having helped to save him from his terrible foe. So she only spoke helpful and bracing words. He had kept on so bravely the past year, never once yielding. Was not that an encouragement for the future? He would not falter now, after so long a battle. Impossible that he should do aught so cowardly. He had to retrieve his honour, to cheer up, to fight all the harder because of his fall. More prayer and firmer trust were needed; and victory in the end was sure. God would help him, she knew—would bring him safely through. No man ever needed to be beaten.

All the morning this went on, and much of the afternoon. Emmie could be of little use. In his brighter moods, her sunny sweetness was invaluable, but in his despair, he needed a more practised hand.

Mrs. Lucas was not without help, however. The sad tale reached Jem's ears by mid-day; and he came at once, to be a tower of strength to the sorrowful wife, and to put fresh courage into the heart of the broken-down man. He promised to look in again next day; and he spoke kind words to Emmie, who had wandered about the house, wondering what she really felt, and whether such an upheaval were actually to take place in her life, as would be implied by her engagement to Sir Cyril Devereux.

"He is so very nice," sighed Emmie again and again. "But I wish—I wish—if only I were a little older!"

In the afternoon, towards tea-time, Captain Lucas fell sound asleep in the study, worn out with remorse. He had been plied with coffee at intervals, and would not need tea. For

the first time, Emmie saw her opportunity. She knew that the sleep might probably last some time; so she coaxed her mother into a comfortable chair by the drawing-room fire, ordered up the tea-tray earlier than usual, and waited on her assiduously, unaware how closely she was herself watched, for she hardly dared to lift her dropped eyelids.

There came presently a soft, "My poor little Emmie!"

"O mother!"

Emmie knelt down on the rug with an arm round Mrs. Lucas.

"I have always feared it might happen again, some day . . . It is so like a disease. One can hardly expect no recurrence . . . Yet some would tell me that is a want of trust. And I know he can be kept from it! . . . Still—time after time—this has come."

"Mr. Trevelyan was so nice, wasn't he?"

"I think he will be an immense help. He promises me to well look after your father. He is just the man for it—kind and thoughtful, and a thorough gentleman. And so very good."

"Mother—"

Something in the voice made Mrs. Lucas look into her daughter's face.

"Mother—Sir Cyril came yesterday—when you were busy, you know. And—"

"He did not see your father?"

"No. I knew you were both in the morning-room. I did offer to call you, but he said there was no need. And I knew you could not well come. But, mother—he—"

The crimsoning face drooped, and Mrs. Lucas' heart beat fast. She drew Emmie closer.

"Yes. He—?"

"He said—something. Something that I must tell you . . . I always tell you everything . . . He asked—He wants me—to be his wife."

Mrs. Lucas could hardly control her thrill of astonishment. She had feared some trembling avowal of Emmie's feelings towards Sir Cyril; but she had not looked for this. It had been a settled matter in her imagination that Sir Cyril was in love with Jean Trevelyan.

"Tell me all, darling."

"I didn't know it was coming—of course. I couldn't think what he meant at first—and I was so full of—that, you know—but I found he was really in earnest. He says—says—he loves me!"—in a whisper. "And he wants me to marry him."

"And you said—?"

"I couldn't answer him at once. How could I—before I had spoken to you? I didn't know what to say; and it seemed so funny. Why, I'm only a child. I asked him to let me have till to-morrow; and he said he supposed I wanted to get used to the idea. And he told me to pity his suspense. But it does seem odd that he should care for me—for little Emmie Lucas! He is so clever and handsome, and everybody likes him."

"Including Emmie?"

"Yes. O yes—I like him." Emmie looked frankly up. "He is so nice and kind to poor father. I don't see how I could help liking him. I like him very much indeed. I should hate to do anything to give him pain."

"Sometimes to give a passing pain is the truest kindness. Emmie, the question really is not whether you like Sir Cyril, but whether you love him."

Emmie's face flushed all over again.

"But—"

"But what?"

"People don't always begin with that, do they? I mean—doesn't it come after they are married, sometimes?"

"Sometimes; but the risk is serious."

Emmie sighed.

"He is so nice," she said, "so very very nice and pleasant. And I do look up to him really, because he is so clever. I like him—oh, ever so much. It's almost a little like loving. Not like the sort of love I have for you, of course; because I don't think anything ever could be the same as that—but still—I do like to see him come in, and it would be very dull if he never came. Don't you think it would?"

"The question is not what I think, my dear."

"Well—I think it would—really. Do you know, mother, he didn't seem afraid about my answer!"

"No? He did not seem very eager or anxious, you mean?"

"No—not exactly—only so kind and pleasant. He saw I was in trouble, mother. And I do think it grieved him. And if he cares so much for me—And if I like him so much—"

"No true man could be satisfied with no more."

"Couldn't he?" with a look of childish sweetness. "But—" tears filling her eyes—"I'm afraid it does look rather tempting. Everything would be so different. Different for you and father. You would have plenty of friends."

"No, my darling; don't deceive yourself. Lady Lucas might give up Sir Cyril for marrying you. She would not accept us because you married Sir Cyril."

"Wouldn't she? I thought—perhaps—"

"Don't think of us at all. Or, if you do, think what it would be to us to lose our one sunbeam. That should not stand in your way, if it were a question of your real happiness. But —"

"Oh!" in a startled tone. "You could not get on without me, of course. I never thought of that. There would be nobody to walk with my father. You can't go any distance—and fancy him wandering about alone . . . But then I should be so near! I could run in every day, and look after him almost the same as now."

"If you were Sir Cyril's wife, your duty would be to him, not to us. He is a man of leisure, and his wife will have her time well filled. Dear Emmie, you must put the thought of us quite aside, and think only of yourself and him. Only you and him! Could you promise to love him all your life—first and best? To love him?"

"Not so much as I love you, of course, mother! How could I possibly?"—with a look of infantine sweetness. "And I should be miserable if I couldn't see you every day, and tell you every single thing as I do now. But I don't like to make him unhappy."

"You must do what is right, and leave his unhappiness to take care of itself. I am not sure that it will be very deep. There may be a touch of self-deception in this sudden fancy . . . Did it never occur to you that he thinks a great deal of Jean Trevelyan?"

Emmie laughed. "Yes, indeed he does. He is always talking of her. It is the funniest thing—but whatever we happen to be speaking about, he always twists the subject round, so as to bring in her name. I really do think it is that, that has kept me from seeing how much he cared for me . . . It's funny, mother . . . And, of course, a man can't care for two girls at once—in that way, I mean . . . And, of course, if he did care for her, he wouldn't ask me to marry him."

"If he knew that he cared for her most. People do not always fully know their own minds. It has been a life-long affection, and perhaps he does not measure the strength of it. His perpetual reference to her ideas and opinions has a suspicious look. No doubt he has been captivated for the moment by this dear little face—" kissing it. "But suppose there were a mistake—and suppose he found out by-and-by —"

"Yes: I see! And you think I had better say 'No' at once?"

"I think you must decide for yourself; but I am very much afraid of a hasty 'Yes,'—for your sake, and for his. I am afraid you might both regret it."

"Yes; I understand. O no; it wouldn't do! Mother, I really am glad. Perhaps I'm a little sorry too, because the Brow and everything would be so nice—except Miss Devereux and Lady Lucas! I should like it so much for you and my father . . . But, of course, that isn't enough. I mean it wouldn't be right to marry him for the sake of anybody else! . . . And somehow, I can't think of Sir Cyril as—as—a husband!"—blushing furiously. "I like him very much indeed, just coming in and out. But I almost think—I'm afraid I should get just a little tired of him, if it were always and always going on."

"And suppose poor Sir Cyril—after losing friends and offending relatives by marrying—suppose he should find the wife, for whom he had given up so much, getting only a little tired of him? Only a little bored with his talk—and impatient of his companionship—and careless about pleasing him—perhaps even pettish and fractious, in return for—?"

"Mother, you needn't go on! I see now quite quite plainly! I didn't understand before. It would be horrid and cruel of me to marry him, feeling as I do. O no—because I don't really love him, and I don't believe I ever could! I'll write a note this minute; and don't you think we might send it—not keep him another whole night in suspense? I suppose he is in a little suspense just now, you know—though I dare say he will get over it soon."

It had indeed been a day of suspense for Cyril, though not precisely that fashion of suspense which Emmeline innocently pictured to herself. How to live through the dragging hours was a problem not easily solved. Most

young men in his condition would at least have had the help of enforced occupation, but Cyril had abundant leisure to suffer his worst.

Sybella's was not a soothing companionship. She fretted him with questions and surmises, was annoyed when he told her nothing, and defended herself with her usual verbosity from charges which nobody had made, turning everything into an argument.

To escape from home-friction, Cyril walked from breakfast until lunch, after which he vanished into his smoking-den for an hour, and then went off for a four hours' ride, barely returning in time for dinner, which indeed had to wait ten minutes while he dressed.

"You never used to be unpunctual, Cyril!"

"I dare say not," Cyril answered.

"It is a very bad habit. It grows upon people."

"It will grow upon me, of course."

"My dear aunt always trained me to be scrupulously punctual. She never allowed slipshod ways. But your dear father was different. He never could be in time for things. I hope you do not mean to take after him."

"Might do worse!" muttered the chafed Cyril. He had tender recollections of his father, and could ill endure to hear him discussed by Sybella.

"What do you say? I really cannot hear when you mumble so, Cyril . . . Is there anything wrong with the soup? You are not taking any . . . Lady Lucas has been here to-day,

calling. And she told me a most dreadful thing. About that miserable nephew of hers—"

"Lady Lucas is an awful old gossip."

"Really, Cyril—"

"There's no need, at all events, to retail her scandal in public."

Something in the suppressed voice warned even Sybella to desist for a while.

When dessert was on the table, and the man had vanished, she began anew—

"I must tell you now! It is not a matter of choice, but of duty—a positive necessity, for your own sake. As for Pearce hearing—everybody will know, so I do not see that it makes much difference. That wretched man, Captain Lucas—No, I cannot be interrupted, Cyril! I really must for once speak out! That wretched man, Captain Lucas, was actually—absolutely—carried home yesterday evening by two policemen—dead drunk! Yes, it is a fact! There can be no possible mistake. It is a most fearful disgrace. Everybody is talking about it, and pitying Lady Lucas. He was seen reeling about in the streets, like any common creature out of a public-house."

"I don't see how he could manage to reel about, if he were dead drunk!"

"Really, Cyril! To take it in such a way! To make a joke of it, almost! And such a dreadful thing! . . . And you can actually stoop to call that man your friend! Captain Lucas—a drunkard—the friend of Sir Cyril Devereux!" Sybella spoke

with more force of expression than she usually had at command.

The arrow went home: only Cyril's brain substituted the word "father-in-law" for "friend." He had grown white, and his brows were drawn sternly together. He cracked half-a-dozen nuts in quick succession, tossing each aside, and asked only—

"Have you done?"

"I suppose you don't believe me, but it is true. Perfectly true. As you will find to your cost. Some day," asserted Sybella, with agitated breaks.

"The main fact is true. Lady Lucas has only improved upon it a little—not more than one might reasonably expect! He was not 'dead drunk,' and he did not require to be carried, I believe—but unhappily, he did take too much."

"As he does constantly—every other day."

"You are misinformed. He has not failed once in the last year and more—till now."

"My dear Cyril! If I did not know it on the best authority—"

Cyril's mutter was unintelligible.

"I assure you, I know it for a fact. He is constantly in that state. Of course, nobody sees him so, because his wife generally contrives to hush it up, and not to let him go out. I suppose, he escaped for once from her control . . . If you were only not so easily imposed upon, my dear Cyril! . . . Lady Lucas tells me his wife is a most designing person. She says there can be no doubt whatever that they are

hoping to make a catch of you! That the young lady is deliberately setting her cap—to use an expression which—"

Cyril could endure no more. He was in a sick tumult of wrath and wretchedness—of wrath with himself, and of wretchedness about his own action, far more than with or about Sybella. She was only the gadfly, adding to his misery; but when one is already strung to intense endurance, a gadfly in addition becomes unbearable.

He stood up abruptly. "Aunt, will you excuse me, please. We need not discuss the question."

"Is anything the matter? Are you ill?" startled by his look. "I will send for Dr. Ingram."

"If you would be so good as to attend to your own business, and not to mine, that is all I ask!" Cyril hardly knew what he said.

The tension had become too great, and the whole room went round dizzily. He could not have stood alone, or walked slowly, but he was able to dash across the hall and into the study, where he flung himself on the sofa, in an overpowering whirl of brain and mind, physical giddiness predominating for the moment over all else.

He had not had a touch of the sensation for years. It brought back vividly, by the more force of association, his earliest meeting with Jean. He saw again the square block-like stones, the rushing water, the swirl of the whole landscape, the little crouching boy; then he heard Jean's clear voice and light footsteps, and felt her small resolute hand clasping his. He had loved Jean from that day onward.

Another scene mixed itself up with the last; again a stepping-stone scene; only this time Jem, not Jean, came to

the rescue.

Cyril heard his own infantine voice asserting positively, "I mean to marry Jean some day!"

And Jem's manlier tones advising delay—advising him to become a man before he spoke; for Jean would never marry one to whom she could not look up.

"Ten years! Twenty years!" groaned Cyril. "And to have cut myself off from her—by—this!"

CHAPTER XIII.

BOULEVERSEMENT.

"She's bonny, blooming, straight and tall,
And lang has had my heart in thrall;
And aye it charms my very saul,
The kind love that's in her e'e."

R. BURNS.

CYRIL had not remembered to lock the door, and he became speedily aware of his mistake. It opened, and a head was inserted.

"Cyril—?"

No answer; so Miss Devereux walked in, and stood looking down on the prone figure: some real solicitude mingling with her dissatisfaction.

"Shall I send for Dr. Ingram?"

"No, thanks. I only wish to be left in peace."

"But, Cyril—! Something must be wrong! If you are not ill, something must have happened. I can't imagine what has come over you to-day . . . I daresay, after all, it has to do with those Trevelyanys . . . I almost always find, if you are out of temper, that Jean is at the bottom of it . . . Of course, it can't really be that you care so much about that odious man—Captain Lucas, I mean. Impossible, you know . . . After all, I really do believe, it is only that something has disagreed with you. If you will take such violent exercise, and eat such unwholesome food, what can one expect? Why, that stew yesterday—my digestion would not stand it for a moment! I shall tell cook never to send it up again."

Cyril lay motionless on his face through this harangue.

"If you go on so, you are sure to end by having some attack. People always do. And as for the Lucases, I only hope you will take warning, and keep clear of them in the future! It ought to be a lesson to you. An artful, designing girl, like Miss Lucas—"

Cyril spoke without stirring. "Will you stop that, if you please! I wish to be alone."

"Well, I must say, I do think you are a very ungrateful nephew," sighed Sybella, with a different species of pathos from the pathos of little Emmie.

"I must say, I do think—! When you have always been so much to me! And, I am sure, the care and thought I have given—And now, just because—Yes, I am going. I haven't the least desire to stay where I am not wanted. Not the very least! I only came to bring you a note. It has been left at the door—Pearce doesn't know, or else he won't say, by whom. And I can't imagine who the note can be from. It is a lady's hand, at least a girl's. It might be a child's. Would you like me to open and see for you, if you are not well?"

"A note!" Cyril's confused brain had not at once taken in the sense of the word. It dawned upon him in a flash; and with a leap he was on his feet, demanding, "Where? Give it to me!"

The astonished Sybella fell back two paces; curiosity strongly awakened. She could not but be aware that something unusual was afloat.

"Where is the note?" he repeated, and Sybella's reluctant fingers yielded it.

"That is not Jean Trevelyan's handwriting, Cyril. Who can it be from? You don't correspond with any other young ladies, I hope!" Her manner implying that Jean was enough and too much!

The words put Cyril on his guard. One glance revealed to him that the childish unformed writing was indeed Emmie's. Within this little Silurian-grey envelope, crookedly directed, lay his fate—the question of his future life-happiness or life-misery, once for all decided! So it seemed to Cyril at the moment, though such apparent decisions do not always turn out to be permanently decisive. Yet, while feeling thus, he had the self-control to turn carelessly away, to toss the note on a side-table, and to walk to the mantelpiece.

"Who is it from, Cyril?"

No answer.

"You know, of course. I see you know. Is anything really the matter? Anything really wrong? One would think it was a bill—from your face!" suggested Sybella, recalling stories of extravagant young men and distressed guardians.

She was not Cyril's guardian now, but her mind was unable to acquiesce in the change wrought by his coming of age.

"A bad bill perhaps!" she went on—without the slightest idea what is meant technically by a "bad bill."

She had heard the term, and it recurred conveniently.

"My dear boy, you had much better make a clean breast of it all. Much better! Far better!" She came near, and laid a hand on his wrist, with an air of advice and interest. "You know I would so gladly help."

"Thanks!" Cyril withdrew his arm from her touch—rather pettishly, it must be confessed, but how could he help it?

He stood upright, holding the mantelpiece; his face colourless, while a surging like the sound of waves filled his ears. Nevertheless, he forced his lips into a smile.

"I have no bad bills; and I have plenty of money. My tastes are not so very extravagant. Much obliged to you all the same. If you have nothing more to say, perhaps you would be so kind as to leave me to myself for half-an-hour. I have—things to do—"

"And I am to understand that you have a secret—and that I am not to be told!"

"You may understand anything that you choose. It is a matter of indifference. Only, be so good as to leave me alone."

Cyril walked across the room, and opened the door.

Sybella had no choice but to go. She complained and protested; but still she went.

Cyril locked and double-locked the door in her rear. Then he returned to his former station, close beside the fire.

He stood there, fidgeting a little box of wax matches, striking one after another with delicate accurate fingers. Not one was bent or broken. He watched each in turn, burning itself out, as if his whole soul were intent on the process of combustion.

Why should he read Emmie's note at once? There was no hurry. Suspense might be bad; but certainty would, in all likelihood, be worse. He had a gleam of hope now; and that little childish note might slay all hope in him for evermore. He could think of Jean now as not impossibly to be his some day; but after reading Emmie's answer, he might be debarred from any such dream.

In a few minutes, all would probably be over—all hope of Jean! All free thought of Jean!

"I mean to marry Jean some day," he had said at ten years old and had meant it ever since—till the doubts and hesitations of the last few months. And now, by a hasty boyish impulse, he had flung that hope out of his own reach —perhaps! There was a "perhaps" still, though a very faint one.

Why should Emmie refuse him? He knew himself to be liked by her; and doubtless her parents would appreciate the advantages, which she might be too young to weigh . . . And if Emmie said "Yes," he would be bound. He would have in honour to go on. In her position, especially, having once sought her, how could he ever cast her off? Nay, if he could, what use? Jean would never have him afterwards.

The rushing sound of waves came back, and Cyril's brain was in a whirl. He bore it for a few seconds; then suddenly, he could endure no longer. Waiting became intolerable; and a burst of impatience drove him to the side-table, where lay the little note. He would know the worst at once.

As he came to the lamp, opened and read, the surging died away into stillness, and every trace of dizziness passed away. Cyril glanced round, with an odd feeling that he had never seen the chairs and tables so motionless. Then he read the note again.

He could hardly believe his own eyes. At first, he almost thought his brain must be playing him false.

Refused—after all!

Emmie "liked him very much, but she was afraid she could not say she loved him." And so "it would not be right." She "was very sorry to give him pain," but "it would be best in the end." The utterances were childishly direct and simple; no manner of hesitation or incertitude about them. She was grateful to Cyril, but she would not have him.

"Emmie! You're a brick!" spoke Cyril aloud.

A man does not like to be refused; and notwithstanding Cyril's relief, notwithstanding the weight lifted from him, there came for one moment a touch of the "wet-blanket"

sensation. He had not expected himself or his belongings to be so lightly valued; and self-satisfaction sustained a wound.

But pride, either wounded or unwounded, could claim only a small share of his attention. As he read and re-read the brief sentences, hardly able to credit the fact that he was free, a great wave of joy swept over him. Jean's face rose once more, quiet, smiling, no longer sad, no longer reproachful . . . Cyril had something of the boy in him yet; not so very surprising at twenty-one. He put his face down on the high mantelpiece, with a sound not far removed from a sob—

"My own dear dear dear Jean! Never, never any one but you!"

Then an unreasoning impulse seized him to rush off there and then to the Rectory; just to look in upon Jean with his bodily eyes, now that he knew they were not parted for life by an ever-widening river . . . Yet could he trust himself? Would he be betrayed into saying too much? To propose to one lady within an hour after being refused by another would be too supremely absurd. Cyril laughed at the idea and resolved not to go.

He could not rest or stand still, but walked to and fro, unquiet with very joyousness, as he pictured Jean at the Brow—Jean at his table—Jean in this study. Emmie's little face never rose between to blot out Jean's. He only felt intensely grateful to Emmie, as he realized his escape from a terrible thraldom, possibly life-long.

He would have to be careful, he knew. If Jean suspected his late fancy for Emmie—and Cyril was pretty sure she did

suspect it—she would not readily put faith in his present frame of mind.

The best plan, undoubtedly, for himself and for all parties concerned, would be to make a thorough break—to get away from Dulveriford entirely. If he only had had something definite to go for! Staying on at the Brow would be awkward in many respects. To cut himself suddenly off from the Lucases would cause remark; yet to go in and out as before would be impossible. To begin at once openly seeking Jean might cause misunderstandings; yet how could he be in the place and not seek her?

Cyril gave the matter full twenty minutes of serious thought. Then he unlocked his door, and with feeling of compunction for Miss Devereux, went to the drawing-room.

Sybella was deeply aggrieved, and in cue for a sulk; but the sight of her nephew's cheerful face and alert air surprised her into speech:

"Why! But, Cyril—! Then it couldn't have been bad news?"

"It!"

"I mean your note?"

"My note! No; why should it?—" with perfect sang-froid. "I came to speak about something very different. I am thinking of a week or two in Town."

"What for?"

"Picture-galleries—"

"Nonsense, Cyril! You can't impose on people like that!"

"And everything else that's going!"

"If you don't choose to tell me the real reason, you needn't at least pretend—"

"I shall start to-morrow morning—early express."

"Such an extraordinary thing to decide all in a moment—and not a word to me—"

"Couldn't publish the fact before I knew it myself. Aunt, you've not heard, I suppose, whether anything is settled about Mr. Trevelyan?"

"I thought you were there all yesterday afternoon."

Cyril's joyous indifference was more amazing to Sybella than his previous irritability.

"At the Rectory! I've not seen Jean for days—not spoken to her, I mean. Nothing settled yet?"

"Mr. Trevelyan is ordered to Australia. Dr. Ingram wants him to stay away two years. I believe he starts in a fortnight."

"And Jean—?"

"Jean will be at Dutton Rectory. He can't afford to take her too. I call it a wild scheme. As likely as not, he will die out there, all alone—not a soul near—and Jean will never see him again. But, of course, it is no concern of ours. I only wish one could hope that the locum tenens would be the sort of man I could approve of, but of course his views—"

Cyril heard no more, though he was dimly conscious that Miss Devereux continued talking. She was apt to continue talking indefinitely so long as anybody was present to listen.

A sudden idea had come to him, of so startling and brilliant a nature, that it nearly took away his breath. He had desired something definite to do; and here it was.

Something for Jean too!—There was the charm of the notion. True, it would mean a long separation. But if all the while, he were acting for Jean, living for Jean—what then, though his waiting should grow to the Patriarch's fourteen years? Cyril felt that they would seem short, for the love that he bore to Jean. He stood in the centre of the room, lost in thought, his eyes sparkling with so remarkable a scintillation that Sybella stared.

"I can't imagine what has come over you to-day," she said.
"You look—"

"Never mind my looks. Aunt, don't stay up for me. I am going out."

"Again! You have been out the whole day."

"I must see Jean."

"What for? Really, Cyril, it is too absurd. There is something underneath all this. Something you have not told me. To go after Jean Trevelyan to-night—Just look at the clock—! And when you have not been well! I know you were not well, by the way you left the dining-room after dinner! Something has disagreed with you, I am quite sure. And if you get a chill upon that, from the night air—! It is perfectly crazy! Perfectly mad! As if you could alter things! Dr. Ingram says Mr. Trevelyan must go; so, of course, he must. He says it is as much as his life is worth to stay through another winter in England. Nobody will care for your opinion . . . But perhaps that note was from Jean, after all—though I don't see why you should make such a mystery of it. I dare say

she got somebody else to write the address, so that I should not know the handwriting."

"About the last thing Jean would ever stoop to do! But I have no note from Jean."

"Well, I don't see, really, what concern we have with their plans. Why should we interfere? I don't attempt to stand between you and your friends; but certainly they are not people who—My dear aunt always highly disapproved of them . . . Cyril, you have tried me very much this evening—you really have!—And I am sure I have been most patient! But there are limits even to—I really do think—I really have a right—in fact, I positively insist upon knowing what is the meaning of this extraordinary behaviour."

Cyril looked down on Miss Devereux's agitated features and twirling hands.

"Very well," he answered, speaking without the least unkindness; "if you insist, you shall know. As well now as later. It means—that I am tired of home, tired of Dulveriford, tired of doing nothing. It means—that if Jean does not object, I shall go out in the same ship with Mr. Trevelyan, and take care of him. It means—that when I come back, if Jean will have me, I shall make her my wife."

For once, Sybella had no words. She could only gaze blankly, her lips and jaws dropping apart.

Cyril walked to the door, paused, came back, and stooped to give her a kiss.

"Good-night," he said pleasantly. "Don't be vexed, aunt. If I have spoken out, it is by your wish. Of course, that about Jean is in confidence. She may or may not be willing . . . Meantime you'll have two years' swing at the Brow, to do as

you like—and I'll take care that you have enough money to carry you on. After that, we must make some other arrangement. I should like to build you a jolly little house, outside Dutton—near to St. John's, you know. But there's plenty of time to think things over. Good-night."

Without waiting for an answer he was gone; and Sybella was left to her own cogitations.

Jean rose from a low chair beside the drawing-room fire to greet Cyril. She seemed to have been for once enjoying the luxury of idleness; and there was a touch of mournful gravity in the look she turned upon him. It brought to Cyril's mind the pale reproachful visionary likeness which had come to him on the marshes, blotting out Emmie's face.

"It is late for a call; but you will give me a few minutes," he said. "Will you not?"

"I can spare a few minutes. It is almost bedtime."

"I have just heard something which I didn't know before. About your father going to Australia for two years. Is it true?"

"Dr. Ingram advises at least a year and a half. He would prefer two years. Yes, it was settled days ago."

"And I never heard! But he ought not to go alone."

"He must."

"Is he well enough?"

"No—not if it could be helped. We have no choice."

"Only, if the thing could be managed—surely, he ought to have a companion. Think, if he were taken worse out there —alone among strangers—"

"I know! Do you think I don't know?" asked Jean, lifting sad eyes to his. "Cyril, I didn't expect you to be cruel. Why should you say it to me? I know all so well, and yet I cannot go. There are all the expenses of his illness—and the locum tenens—and his voyage! And I shall cost him almost nothing in England, living with cousin Chrissie and Jem. Don't you see?—The thing has to be."

"I'm not speaking unkindly, but because I have a reason." Cyril moved to a chair nearer Jean, and looked earnestly into her face. "Jean—I have a plan, and I think it may be a comfort to you. Will you let me go out with Mr. Trevelyan? Will you trust him with me—as my charge?"

"You?"

"I mean it. I'm not joking. To-morrow I shall run up to Town for a few days; and I can get an outfit in no time. There isn't a grain of difficulty. I'll secure my passage at once in the same vessel and be ready to start . . . It's the most delightful thing I ever thought of. I'm sick of the Brow, and I want something to do, and I've been longing to see more of the world. The expense is nothing. I'll do my best to bring him back to you, safe and sound. Will you trust me?"

A thought came swiftly to Jean as she listened. "He has gone too far with Miss Lucas, and thinks it best to escape!"

Yet she doubted, because of his joyous air; and while the guess was not so very wide of the mark, Jean was ignorant of attendant circumstances. She did not know what to believe, and answered slowly, after some hesitation: "Yes; if you really wish to go, for your own sake. It would be the greatest relief—of course—to know that somebody would be with him."

"For my own sake—and for his—and most of all for your sake!"

"No, not for mine. But if you seriously think of going to Australia for your own sake, then I should be only too thankful if you could be in the same ship with my father."

"Most of all for your sake, Jean!"

Cyril repeated the words emphatically, and it was impossible to mistake his meaning. No flush came to Jean's pale cheek, as she replied, "Call it what you like. I shall be very grateful."

"I don't want gratitude. I want something different. When I come back—Jean, listen to me—don't turn away! I have no right to speak now—I know I have not—but when I come back—"

He had not meant to say this; the words seemed to be wrenched from him.

"Stop, Cyril! Hush! I must go upstairs."

"Not yet. There's no hurry. I must know about the ship; and you must listen to me. When I come back, if I have carried out my trust faithfully—then—"

"No—I am not going to listen."

"You must! You don't know what I want to say."

Jean laid her hand resolutely across Cyril's mouth.

"No—hush—I will not!" she repeated. "You are to say no more! . . . What of that poor little Miss Lucas? You see—I know! I dare say you have meant no harm—and you are doing this kindness to my father, so I must not blame you—but there cannot be any playing fast and loose. What you do is for his sake—your sake—anything you like, only not to do with me!"

Cyril removed her hand from his mouth, and kept it prisoner. He had merely meant to give her a gentle hint as to his hopes; but now there seemed to be no choice about speaking out; now he could not restrain himself. It might be the last chance for two years or more.

"You needn't be afraid, Jean. I'm not doing what is wrong. You don't understand how things are, and I want to make you understand! . . . I've been a fool, and I don't deny it! She has not suffered—she doesn't care a rap for me! Yes, I know—for she won't have me . . . I suppose it was a sort of craze. I did think I wanted her; and I was demented enough to speak—and then I found out! I shall not forget what it was—to feel that I had put a barrier between you and me for life! It was—awful . . . I seem to have lived through ten years yesterday. Till her answer came, I mean! . . . You see—I'm hiding nothing from you! And you can think what you like—despise me, if you like—But if ever I marry, you will be my wife! You—and nobody else."

"Are you going to keep me much longer?"

"Not if you will stay without being kept. I'm not asking you to say anything now. It wouldn't be fair. I can't expect you to believe in me yet. Only, by-and-by, when I come back—when you find out that I am the same—that I shall always be the same—don't you think—? No, I'm not asking you to speak, really! You shall give me an answer in two years. I'm only telling you how things are . . . You are entirely free—only, when I come back, Jean, I shall ask you to be mine! And if you won't—But I can't let myself think of that! Life wouldn't be life without you! Till then I shall live on hope. And your face will be with me always—night and day. You'll think of me sometimes—won't you?"

"You want to know the name of my father's ship," said Jean.

Somehow she could not make her voice quite so prosaic as she wished, for a strange joy was fluttering at her heart.

"Yes—I'll write it down in my pocket-book." After doing which, Cyril said in disappointed accents, "Not one word!"

"I thought you were not asking for a word. You inconsistent boy!" said Jean calmly. She lifted her eyes, dropped hitherto; and there was in them the old golden shining, once reserved for Oswald.

It was too much for Cyril's complete self-control. He made a hasty motion, an impulsive start forward, as if to clasp her in his arms; but Jean as quickly eluded him, stepping back.

"No! No! Nothing of that sort," she said in an odd restrained voice. "No nonsense, please. I shall not see you again till just at last—and then not alone. We are only friends still, just as we always have been. Both perfectly free. You understand? If I choose to marry meantime—Or if you choose to bring home a nice little Colonial wife—"

"Jean, if you say another word—"

"Then—good-bye!" And she vanished.

BOOK IV.

THE UPSHOT OF IT ALL.

"Yet in one respect,

Just one, beloved, I am in nowise changed;
I love you, loved you . . . loved you first and last,
And love you on for ever. Now I know
I loved you always."

E. B. BROWNING.

CHAPTER I.

DUTTON GOSSIP.

"Mrs. Can.—Well, but this may be all a mistake. You know,
Sir Benjamin, very trifling circumstances often give
rise
to the most injurious tales."

"School for
Scandal."

"ANY of those circulars ready, Jean? No matter if not—but
—"

Jean mutely indicated a pile.

"All done! Thanks! You are a helper worth having. Now can you undertake the addresses? I have a list somewhere—in my study."

"My dear Jem!" remonstrated Mrs. Trevelyan. She had her feet on the fender, and an open story-book on her knee.

"I wonder where we are now," murmured Jean.

Jem looked up, and his grey eyes broke into laughter. When absorbed in thought, he had a harassed look, too old for his thirty-five years; but when he smiled, all was transformed; signs of wear and tear vanished; and hollows were mysteriously filled up.

"I forgot! Yes, of course—we adjourned here. All right—I have found the list. Just take the names in order, as they come."

"Jem, you really have no conscience. Jean has been at work for you the whole day," drowsily remarked Mrs. Trevelyan.

"Oh, I like it. Not another word, please, mother. Yes, give me the list."

Jem delayed to scan Jean questioningly, and she met his gaze with a frank smile.

Two years and a quarter in Dutton Rectory had transmuted her into a daughter of the house. Mrs. Trevelyan was no longer "cousin" but "mother"; and Jem was a charming mixture of pastor, master, and brother.

Jean had developed fast in this new environment. She was in fuller correspondence with it than with any previous atmosphere. While not a whit less decisive and practical, she had become softer, gentler, more gracious. That half of

her which had been assiduously repressed at Dulveriford Rectory was assiduously cultivated at Dutton Rectory; and Jean's whole being responded to the cultivation, opening out like a flower in warm sunshine, after long exposure to east winds. She was less shy and reserved; her smiles had learnt to come and go freely; and the old habitual gravity was replaced by habitual sunshine. This was the real Jean, never before permitted to expand into her natural outlines. Dearly as she loved her father, much as she felt the long separation from him, hardly anything could have occurred more effectual for the finishing touches needed by her womanly shape, than such a spell of Dutton Rectory life.

A second long and severe illness, several months past, through which Mr. Trevelyan had been nursed by Cyril with a daughter's devotion, had delayed the return of the travellers beyond the time originally fixed; but now they were believed to be actually en route for home, coming, for the sake of the voyage, "by long sea" round the Cape of Good Hope. Cyril's last letter, written from Melbourne, had spoken of immediately securing their passage in the "Spanish Gipsy," expected to start some three weeks or so later.

Since the receipt of this letter, no news had arrived; and such an unwonted gap in the correspondence caused much perplexity. The "Spanish Gipsy" had now been for many weeks on her way. Whether Mr. Trevelyan and Cyril were on board remained an open question, though there seemed to be no substantial reason for doubting the fact.

When they should reach England, Dutton Rectory would have to part with its "daughter;" no agreeable prospect for Jem or his mother. Jean had made herself a necessary of life to them both.

But why needed matters so to end? Gentle Mrs. Trevelyan often put this question to herself, thinking how easily and prettily a wind-up could have been effected in one of her favourite story-books. Dear Jem only had to say, "Will you marry me, Jean?" and Jean only had to say, "Yes, I will, Jem," and then they could all three live together and be happy ever after.

Dear Jem, however, showed not a ghost of an inclination to do anything of the kind. He was fond of Jean, and he sometimes remarked what a fine-looking useful girl she was; while Jean was delighted to be employed, and seemed to have an unlimited veneration for Jem's opinion on all manner of vexed questions. Yet this by no means proved that Jem wanted to marry Jean, or that Jean would have been willing to marry Jem.

A man seldom chooses his wife for her business capabilities; and a woman may have an enormous respect for the mental and spiritual calibre of a man, whom she could on no account accept for a husband. They jogged on famously together as cousins—or as Rector and female Curate—but tokens of an impending love affair, with a distant view of church-bells and orange-blossoms, simply were not. Jean never blushed; Jem never looked conscious.

Two years and a half in Dutton had established Jem there as a leading man; generally popular because of his charm of manner; though not universally approved, because he could not always think what others thought, or do what others would have dictated. He had, of course, opponents and detractors. Colonel Atherstone looked at him askance; and Colonel Atherstone's little clique cast oblique glances in imitation of their leader. Jem was still not enough of a party-man to be swallowed down, views and all, at one

gulp, by any particular party in the Church—High or Low, Evangelical or Broad.

But he was the man in Dutton of all others to whom people appealed in perplexity, and to whom they came in sorrow. His wisdom was found to be just and true, his sympathy unbounded, his readiness to take trouble untirable. Above all, his life was seen to be fair and Christ-like; therefore his influence was widespread and deep. In contact with his free and loving spirit, it even came to pass that the narrow sometimes grew a little less narrow, the bumptious a little less bumptious, the condemnatory a little less condemnatory.

After this long digression—!

"Sure you have not done too much?" asked Jem.

"Not an atom! Though I know who has!"—sotto voce.

Jem ignored the last remark. "Well, but don't go on too long. I'm apt to be hard on my helpers."

"I shouldn't have thought you were ever hard on anybody."

"You think not?"

Jean failed to decipher the look which crept over his face—a tired self-questioning look—a look which she had always associated, and always would associate, with Evelyn Villiers. Jean could never slay this association of ideas. It had begun vaguely in her childhood, had taken definite shape in her girlhood; had survived until now. She no longer counted Jem to be in love with Evelyn. Observation and judgment both told her that he had or must have overcome the old romantic fancy—"if it had only been a fancy!" And the idea of Jem marrying, seldom occurred to her mind.

Still she was conscious of a certain power possessed by Evelyn over Jem's spirits—like the power of greater or less air-pressure on the mercury of a thermometer. Evelyn herself did not know it; but her touch in a moment sent his mercury up or down. When this particular look came, a look of strain and weariness, with indented hollows in cheek and brow, Jean never could resist an instinctive recurrence of thought to Evelyn. Had Evelyn said or done something to worry him?

Aloud Jean said nothing, and Jem went back to his writing, but the effort of work was manifest. Twice there was a renewed break; and she saw his hand steal over the thick hair, already streaked with grey.

"I wish you would give in, and take an hour's rest," she murmured.

"Too much to do! I am behind-hand as it is."

"Jean, dear, I do so like the way you do your hair now," interposed Mrs. Trevelyan, who had been sleepily speculating about "dear Jem's" possible future, and why a particular arrangement might not come to pass.

"Don't you, Jem?"

Jem laughed, and said, "Very neat."

"It shows the shape of her head so nicely. Jean has such a well-shaped head. The bumps are all in good proportion."

Jean's pen went vigorously.

"She has such an amount of veneration. I can't endure a flat head. It always means a small poor conceited nature. Jean's head at the top is like—"

"Like a cupola," suggested Jem.

"Now, my dear Jem!"

"Or an apple-dumpling," said Jean.

"No, indeed! You have veneration—and decision—and perseverance—"

"And a whole lot of quarrelsomeness in the bumps behind my ears."

"Combativeness," corrected Jem.

"I don't see the difference. Oh!—here's an interruption! Come in!"

"Miss Atherstone, sir."

"Jean, you'll undertake the good lady."

"Miss Atherstone asked for you, sir."

"Never mind! I'll go," quoth Jean. "Some stupid meeting, I dare say—or soup-tickets. If you are really wanted, I'll call you. Mother looks half asleep."

Miss Atherstone disapproved of Jem's views, real or supposed, on Church questions; therefore she never called at the Rectory except on business. She met Jean with a solemn air, and received dubiously the excuse of Jem's over-full time.

"Yes—he is a busy man we all know," she assented, looking at the rubbed knuckles of her second-best kid gloves, which she had counted quite good enough for the Rectory.

She wore a puce-coloured silk dress, relegated from long evening wear, a good deal frayed, and not exactly suited to a very cold May day; and her brown bonnet was trimmed with blue cornflowers interspersed among nodding ears of corn, more appropriate for autumn than for spring. Every time she moved her head, those ears bobbed stiffly; and Jean found a fascination in watching for the next bob, distantly akin to the interest with which one watches for the next wave-splash on a sea-beach.

"A very busy person!"—with an accent of pity, as if to imply, "Busy, alas, about what?"

For the Colonel still counted Jem a dangerous young man!
And his sister dutifully followed suit.

"Perhaps you could give me a message for him," suggested Jean.

"Thank you—but really—no, it is of no consequence," hesitated Miss Atherstone. "Merely a—merely an idea—Another time, perhaps."

"He will come in a moment, if you wish."

No, Miss Atherstone would not have him called. O no, certainly not. She fidgeted with her twirled glove-ends, always too long for the fat short fingers. And Mrs. Trevelyan was resting in the study—not very strong, she believed. How very useful Miss Trevelyan must be in the house—like an adopted daughter! So delightful to have a home among relations, during her father's absence. And Mr. Trevelyan was quite recovered from his second illness? Dear! How trying that must have been! And he had been for a voyage since to the South Sea Islands, had he not? And he was coming home round the Cape, was he not? Dear! How nice! What a travelled man he would be! They were expected

home very soon, she was told—Mr. Trevelyan—and—and—Sir Cyril Devereux with him!

Jean could not in the least have told what it was in the utterance which made her colour deepen. She was not given to blushing; and till this moment she had firmly believed that no human being beyond their two selves knew of the state of affairs between herself and Cyril. Jean had never breathed a word on the subject; and she had no idea of what Cyril had impulsively said to Miss Devereux.

Sybella, being—from her point of view, wisely—desirous to keep the notion a dead secret, had only let it slip to Lady Lucas, and Lady Lucas had only told a dozen other people, always under a strict pledge of secrecy. The tale thus weighted had travelled slowly: still, it had travelled.

A faint whisper of it even reached Jem, and in that direction went no farther. Gossip was apt to fall back, innocuous, from the shield of Mrs. Trevelyan's gentle density; and if the story as expressed in airy undulations, ever pattered on the drums of her ears, it had failed to reach her brain. Nobody had mentioned it to Jean; for people were a little afraid of Jean, unless they knew her well; and the few who did know her well, were the last who would have said anything.

So until now she had been able to speak of Cyril easily and without a blush, because she never supposed anybody to suspect how matters lay. Indeed, Jean herself was by no means sure how things did or would lie. Cyril wrote her constantly and freely; but they always had corresponded from childhood; and Cyril did not use lover-like terms. He had attempted it at first, and Jean had made no response, being determined to leave him free; so he had dropped the attempt. That was now over two years ago; and two years are a long time under the age of twenty-four.

Whatever amount of questioning had gone on below the surface with Jean, she had till this instant shown no consciousness in connection with Cyril. And now, all in a moment, without warning, at the sound of his name, uttered in a tone of peculiar meaning, her cheeks flamed.

Miss Atherstone's sharp little eyes ran all over Jean. "Yes?" she said, and waited, as if most willing to act feminine confessor. "Yes? It has been a long separation!"

"Very long," Jean replied, looking her caller straight in the face, though unable to control her own colouring. "But if my father comes home strong again, I shall not regret the parting."

Miss Atherstone sighed lugubriously—quite à la Sybella.

"And one may hope—" she said. "One may hope—! Travel does improve the mind! At least, people say so. Sir Cyril was so young—painfully young, poor boy, before he went out! One cannot but hope, at least, that his most unfortunate attachment to that little Miss Lucas—a merely passing fancy, no doubt—"

Another wave of colour swept into the first, and Jean was wroth with herself. She sat resolutely upright, her eyes shining with an angry gleam. Was that tale known too? Could nothing ever be hidden in Dutton? But she only said, "Miss Lucas?"

"Oh, I thought you were sure to have heard! And, after all, it might be a mistake. Some have said that he was engaged all the time—elsewhere!" significantly. "Pray do not be annoyed, Miss Trevelyan. I sincerely hope it may be untrue. No one could wish such a connection for Sir Cyril! So very objectionable! I merely allude to what everybody remarked—the way he haunted that house for weeks. But probably,

poor youth, he became aware of his danger, and wisely fled from it. If only it has not been an exchange for something worse!"

Had Miss Atherstone an object in saying all this? Was she seeking to discover the state of Jean's feelings towards Cyril? Had she been sent by Miss Devereux? Was she stupid or was she wicked? Jean put these questions silently, in girlish indignation, while saying aloud, "I think 'everybody' would be better occupied in attending to their own concerns. One gets out of patience with Dutton gossip."

It was Miss Atherstone's turn to be angry, and the ears of corn oscillated as if stirred by a gale.

"I am not accustomed, I must say, to having a friendly interest in others' welfare called by so harsh a name," she said, caressing again her untidy finger-tips.

"But, after all, it is of no consequence! One must submit, in this world, to be misunderstood! It is one of the trials of life! . . . As you imply, Sir Cyril's movements do not concern us! He is quite at liberty to get himself engaged out there, if he chooses—to a squatter's daughter! Or a bushman's! It really concerns nobody—except his poor excellent worthy aunt! And I am sure Miss Devereux had had little enough of comfort in her nephew! Such devotion to him—and such a poor return! Such ingratitude! She has had a succession of troubles. If she were not so truly good as she is, she must have sunk beneath them . . . And this will be only one trial more. One burden added! She will be resigned. Dear Miss Devereux is always so sweetly resigned. As I tell her, it is quite a lesson . . . But to have to make way for, such a successor! A mere Colonial young lady! Oh, I believe the family is not bad. Not bushrangers!" with a solemn attempt at a joke.

"And the girl herself is pretty. In the style of Miss Lucas—small, and dark eyes! Still—a Colonial family! One does not expect that, for Sir Cyril Devereux! And his beloved aunt allowed no choice—no opinion—after her years of devotion to him!"

Jean's colour did not deepen further; nor did it fade too fast.

"How soon are they going to be married?" she asked.

"I am not sure that the date is settled," said Miss Atherstone, her eyes running over Jean again. "In fact, the engagement is still something of a secret."

"A Dutton secret, I suppose!"

The satire was lost upon Miss Atherstone. "Not Dutton," she said. "A friend of mine has a sister out in Melbourne."

"I see. So it is on the very best authority. And you came to tell us the news as soon as you heard. How kind!"

"Sir Cyril will no doubt make the matter known when he reaches England."

"No doubt. But I don't see why he should not wait to marry her, and bring her home."

"If he has started—"

"We do not know that he has. The last letter spoke of probably taking their passage—and since then there has been a gap in our correspondence. We have been rather puzzled; but this explains all," said Jean, with the utmost composure. "Sir Cyril has most likely settled at the last moment to stay behind and be married. And in that case

my father would, I fancy, come home by Suez. Why, he might arrive any day!"

"Well, I can see that you will not omit to give a welcome to the bride of your old playfellow," said Miss Atherstone, with a touch of something like spite, because she was conscious of failure. She found her feet awkwardly, as she spoke.

"No, indeed! We shall have to make a big arch of welcome at the Brow entrance."

Jean rang the bell, tranquilly shook hands, and smiled Miss Atherstone out of the room. Then she stood still—to think.

"It may be true!" she pronounced slowly, half aloud. "Not sure! But not impossible. How can one tell? Why should he not? We are perfectly free—both of us! I have taken care of that. And I have always said I would not blame him—if—"

She did not finish the sentence, but pulled herself together, and went to the study.

"Nothing important?" asked Jem. "Why, Jean!—I could almost think you had been in a passion. Pardon the idea."

"I think I have. She didn't come on business, really—only to talk gossip. I can't imagine how she had the face to ask for you; but, of course, she would have made some excuse for doing it, if you had appeared. Mother asleep, I see."

Jean fell fiercely to work over the addresses, trying to smother thought in action. There was a sore consciousness, deep down, that if this tale proved to be true, life would look very blank. She had thought herself prepared for anything—but somehow—that "somehow" meant a good deal.

For a while only the soft scratching of rival pens could be heard. Then Jem asked—

"Can you go to the Park to-day?"

"This afternoon? Does Evelyn want me?"

"She would like a call after tea. I met her before lunch."

"Miss Moggridge will be out then, I suppose. I would rather have got all this done. But if I ought—"

"I should like you to go."

"Nothing wrong with Evelyn?"

A pause; and then, in hushed tones—

"She does not look well, or happy. This is for yourself only. You might be some help."

"I don't see how. Why doesn't she go to you for advice?"

The question had no answer.

"I'll do as you wish, of course. But it will only be 'Miss Moggridge' again. She doesn't suit Evelyn; and nothing can make them suit . . . After all, if they were apart, would Evelyn be happier? Evelyn has always had her pet worry ever since I can remember. First it was Miss Devereux; and then the General; and then losing him; and now Miss Moggridge. If it were not Miss Moggridge, I suppose it would be something or somebody else . . . Jem, you do look tired this afternoon! What is the reason? Has Evelyn said anything to worry you?"

Jem's "Nonsense!" had an unwontedly brusque sound.

Jean was off her balance, or she would not have made the suggestion.

"I should not be surprised! I don't mean anything unkind. Nobody loves Evelyn more than I do—but that is the very reason! I mean, when she looks so sweet and sad, and those great eyes are just like a wounded collie's begging for pity—Oh, I'm every inch as absurd as anybody can be. I forget all she has in life to make her happy; and it gives me a heartache for hours after. I believe it gives you the same—or a headache," added Jean prudently, wondering why she had said so much. "I wish Evelyn had to be busy; not so much time to sit and dream."

"If you go after tea, I will call an hour later to walk home with you."

"Yes, do. That will be nice. I hear the tea going into the drawing-room. Oh—another interruption!"

This time Captain Lucas was shown into the study. He had become a frequent visitor there, and Jem's strengthening uplifting influence had worked wonders with the man. Not only had he fought through more than two years without another breakdown; but the very fight had become easier, the craving less keen and more controllable. Jem kept him employed in many ways, found him new interests and pleasures, and exercised, busy as he was, a constant watchfulness, which gave invaluable help to the wife and daughter.

Jean was often at the red house, Emmie often at the Rectory; and something of a friendship had sprung up between the two girls, affectionate on the part of Jean, unlimited in admiration on the part of Emmie.

Captain Lucas looked serious and troubled. "I want a word with you, presently," he said to Jem; but he consented to take tea first with the ladies.

Then the two gentlemen retired to the study, and Jean sped away to the Park.

CHAPTER II.

THE "SPANISH GIPSY."

"To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day.

• • • • •

"Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more."

SHAKESPEARE.

JEAN'S estimate of Evelyn Villiers as one who "had always a pet worry," was not far wrong—indeed, such a statement might perhaps be made of nine out of every ten individuals, then or now—yet it was an estimate with two sides. Almost

everything has two sides, if it possesses a side at all; and here was no exception.

The distinctive characteristic of Evelyn's case lay, not so much in the possession of a worry, or a succession of worries, as in the fact of rather too much leisure for looking at those worries; perhaps too in the absence of a spirit which should lift her above them. Life hitherto had been too soft and shielded for the richer development of Evelyn's character. She was like a plant, by nature hardy, which would flourish on the border of Alpine snow, but which grows pale and sickly in the vitiated air of a hothouse.

Still these worries were real of their kind; no mere outgrowth of the imagination. It is fair to admit so much. Sybella Devereux would have been a severe trial to almost any young niece, flung upon her tender mercies. The General, with all his goodness, must have been a pull upon the patience of any wife who could not entirely submit her opinions to his. The sorrow of losing him must have been in any case enhanced by the recollections of previous friction. As for Miss Moggridge—Jean was often fain to admit that she too would have found that excellent lady tiresome as a life-long companion. But then, why had Evelyn created the companionship?

Miss Moggridge was undoubtedly excellent, in the true sense of the word. She excelled alike in right principle, in right feeling, in right action. That is not to say she was perfect; but who is perfect? She had her faults, of course, like other people. She was, theoretically, so liberal-minded that, practically, she could see no manner of illiberality in another without risings of righteous anger. And, unfortunately, with her, as with many other good people, human anger is apt to outrun the righteous boundary.

To put it differently, she was—or, at all events, she counted herself—so broad in her mental and spiritual make, that it made her wrathful to find anybody narrow. But most naturally, the narrow individual, who called his narrowness by the more euphonistic title of "sound principle," failed to see the Christian beauty of a broadism, which was flung like a cudgel at his devoted head. Since his narrower line of thought was every inch as much a matter of right with him as Miss Moggridge's broader line of thought was a matter of right with her, it was to the last degree improbable that she should cudgel him over to her way of thinking. Nay, the question even arises in the mind of a quiet looker-on—was her vaunted broadism altogether broad, and did it not partake of inevitable human narrowness, only under a fresh guise?

Evelyn herself was not narrow, rather the reverse. Since her husband's death, however, she could not patiently endure aught which might seem to be levelled at his memory. This made Miss Moggridge peculiarly liable to tread upon Evelyn's corns; and with all her devotion to Evelyn, Miss Moggridge was clumsy in her manner of walking.

The two ladies had rubbed on together for three years, and might rub on a good deal longer; but such "rubbing on" can hardly mean present happiness, however much it may be expected to improve one's spiritual shape in the end. Moreover, though friction does commonly wear away corners, it may be so applied as only to sharpen the angles.

Jean had been into Evelyn's boudoir, one may safely assert, hundreds of times; yet she rarely entered that room without at least a transient recollection of a certain snowy day,

years since, when she had witnessed the last parting between General Villiers and his young wife.

Such recallings were more vivid than usual on this particular afternoon; notwithstanding the difference of a clear May day, cold but sunshiny. Perhaps the association of ideas lay in Evelyn's listless and sad air. She welcomed Jean lovingly; then sank back in a cushioned chair, lifting deep violet eyes, full of the dumb-animal appeal, of which Jean had spoken to Jem. The face, though so much older and strictly less beautiful, was infinitely sweet and attractive. Jean, always strongly under the influence of this attraction, could never agree with Sybella Devereux's verdict as to "how dear Evelyn was gone off in her looks."

"Sit down here by me, Jean. Sit down, and talk me into a better frame of mind. I am feeling wicked. Nothing is worth doing or worth living for; and I am sick of everything and everybody. Except—yes, of course, there are always exceptions. Does it sound very dreadful?"

"It sounds dyspeptic. You had better see Dr. Ingram," Jean said the words in jest; and then she wondered if she ought not to say them seriously. Jem had remarked that Evelyn was not looking well. Not well! The little hand, lying on her knee, was transparent; and the fair face seemed to have shrunk, lending unnatural largeness to the eyes. Had this come suddenly? It dawned upon Jean in a flash.

"Dr. Ingram would laugh at me. O yes, he would. He can laugh at feminine nerves."

"Evelyn, have you grown thin lately?"

"My dresses have all grown too big. Things stretch so!"

Jean lifted the slight hand, and looked it over attentively.

"Rings don't stretch—do they?" laughed Evelyn. "I'm in danger of losing mine. It is all right, Jean—nothing but want of interest in life. I can't eat, and Miss Moggridge gives me no peace . . . I'm so tired of it all—and of her! If I could only manage to see the dear creature once a day, for an hour or two, we should get on. But every day, and all day!—Sometimes I don't know how to breathe."

"Only—"

"You look exactly as Mr. Trevelyan did this morning. I was prowling round the Church, and I came across him—or he came across me. Somehow, I had a confidential fit—one does with some people, you know—and I told him what I was feeling. Not about Miss Moggridge: there was no need to drag her name in: Only that everything seemed 'stale and unprofitable!'"

"And he said—"

"Said I was wrong, quite plainly. The feeling might be inevitable—perhaps physical—but I was wrong to give in to it. He told me, almost sternly, that life ought not to be empty for me—that I ought to find an object, if I have not one. He spoke of poverty of aim, and living too much for self . . . It is all true, no doubt, but—Do you find him stern? I did not expect it."

"No," Jean said wonderingly.

"I suppose he thinks mine a mere butterfly existence, all for pleasure. And yet—"

She stopped speaking; and two large tears crept from under her lashes.

"It must seem absurd to you—to everybody—that I should talk of troubles. I, in my easy existence! Yet things are not always exactly what they seem . . . I think I would give half my remaining years, if the choice were offered me, to have him back for one month. It would be—such rest. He loved me so truly. And nobody—"

"Don't say that. It is not quite real."

"Perhaps not in one sense; but in another—Jean, how can you enter into it all? I am so much older. There are different kinds of love; and some kinds don't meet one's craving . . . I suppose one cannot often have just what one would choose. Better not, some would say. I don't see that. I suppose the denial has to be—but to be loved is such a help! . . . Mr. Trevelyan said, in that calm cold manner of his —"

"Jem cold!!"

"Did I call him 'cold'? No, 'cold' is hardly the word. It means repulsion, and he does not repel. He wins one's confidence somehow—in an abstract sort of way. But his manner is so entirely self-mastered—as if he had reached a height beyond all passion of feeling. Almost as if nothing that merely touched himself could never ruffle him again. It is beautiful, of course; only a little chilly. That was what he was this morning—very kind, but just a degree chilly. He listened to me with such intense patience, and looked most gentle—as he does, you know—yet when he spoke, he was stern . . . He said life ought to be something better for me than drifting down the stream, and getting myself bruised among jagged rocks. He told me to take my oars, and row up the stream . . . And, of course, he is right—he is perfectly right! . . . If only I had energy to obey!"

"Jem is not stern or cold! Evelyn, what can you mean? You don't understand Jem."

"Do I not?" Two drops again shone on Evelyn's lashes, then dropped heavily? "How silly I am!" she said, with a laugh. "Like a baby! After all, what can I do in life that is different? I am set down here—tied to a place that I detest. Yes, I detest it, Jean. I never can love Dutton, even for my husband's sake. Sometimes I think I will abdicate—throw up everything, and install Thomas Villiers in my place. He is a man who would not abuse such a trust. Then I should be free, and I could go and work at the East-End. I have had for years a craving for that kind of life—a life of real hard work for others . . . My husband would not have chosen it for me, perhaps—to become a deaconess or sister, I mean. But where he is now—don't you think they see with other eyes? Things must look so different there! He will understand now—if he sees—the want in my life—the need for fresh interests . . . I should like to turn everything upside down, and to start afresh."

"Would that make you happier?"

"You think I should want the Park back as soon as I had given it up? O no—never. I am so weary of the place . . . Now I have talked enough about myself. It is a bad habit. No letters yet from our wanderers?"

"None. Jem thinks that the last before they started must have gone astray—perhaps not been posted. And they may for once have skipped over a mail or two before that. Once really off, we must of course expect a long break. We shall hear in good time, I dare say."

"And you don't worry yourself in the least—brave sensible Jean!"

"I'm too busy; and what is the use? Generally one finds in the end some common-sense explanation, which one might have known all the time. If anything had happened to put off their starting in the 'Spanish Gipsy,' why should they not have written to say so? If they were staying on at Melbourne, what should have prevented their writing? Unless—One possible explanation has come up. A piece of gossip, but I don't know why it should not be true," said Jean hardily, without a blush. "Miss Atherstone says Cyril is engaged."

"To—whom?"

"A young lady in Melbourne."

Evelyn did not at once repudiate the idea, as Jean had expected. "How did Miss Atherstone hear?"

"A letter from a friend to a friend of hers. Then you think it is true?" asked Jean, with a terrible heart-sinking.

"Cyril has mentioned several times a girl, named Liliias Mackenzie. I have had a passing suspicion more than once. However—" Evelyn hesitated, not looking at Jean.

Though Cyril had not confided in his sister before he left home, Evelyn had a pretty clear inkling as to affairs; but after two years of separation, who could foretell what might come to pass?

"It maybe all nonsense. Your father says nothing."

"He would not. It is not his way."

"If there were an engagement, why should not Cyril speak out?"

Evelyn put this question doubtfully, and was again silent. Jean longed to know more, but could not bring herself to ask. Cyril had never so much as mentioned to her the name of Lilias Mackenzie; nor had her father. The latter had meant little; for Mr. Trevelyan was not good at items of news. Did Lilias Mackenzie live in Melbourne? Had Cyril and Lilias met constantly, through the months of Mr. Trevelyan's long illness and convalescence? Was that why Mr. Trevelyan and Cyril had returned to Melbourne for some weeks, after their trip to the South Sea Islands before turning homeward? How natural and simple the whole seemed! Jean kept strict watch over her face while thinking such thoughts—successful watch, she believed, till she looked up, to meet a wistful and compassionate gaze. Evelyn's hand came on hers with a soft pressure. This would not do. Nobody might suspect. Nobody should blame Cyril. Jean braced herself for action immediately.

"If there were an engagement, I don't see why he should not stay out to marry Miss Mackenzie," she said, with cheerful composure. "So I told Miss Atherstone. It would be absurd to come home, and then to go out again. And that long voyage round the Cape—Oh, he would never do it! Much more likely that he should stay behind; and if my father were travelling alone, he would perhaps come by Suez after all. If they had not taken their passage, that is to say . . . Miss Atherstone says the girl is little and pretty, with dark eyes. Cyril admires dark eyes."

"Does he? I don't remember. Well—we shall see. People often do unexpected things."

Evelyn was no whit deceived by Jean's cheerfulness, but she at once fell in with the assumed mood.

Then Jem was announced, and a slight flush came to Evelyn's cheeks, as she welcomed him with her usual gentle grace. Jem had a strange look, Jean thought; and Evelyn saw the same. He was pale, with an unusual pallor, as if some shock had driven all the blood inward; and his eyes had an absorbed expression.

Jean wondered whether he observed Evelyn's rare flush and brightness. A gleam of the old beauty came back, together with a new delicacy; but she hardly thought Jem was awake to either. His mind seemed to be elsewhere—an unusual event with one whose interest was always so keenly present. For once, he appeared to have nothing to say.

"Jean told me that you would walk home with her," Evelyn remarked: one or two observations having won no response. "Too late to offer you tea, I'm afraid . . . How is Mrs. Trevelyan to-day? She will not like this east wind . . . No letters yet from abroad! Curious, is it not?"

A nameless change, crossing Jem's face, arrested Evelyn's attention—a wave of some strong feeling, quickly checked. She talked on other topics for three or four minutes, then reverted to the non-arrival of letters; and again the same look was manifest.

"Jean dear, would it trouble you very much—I wish you would go to my room, and hunt for the second volume of Jean Ingelow's 'Poems.' Mrs. Trevelyan has the first, and I promised to lend her the second. You will find it upstairs—somewhere."

Jean went at once, conscious of being purposely sent away. She suspected that Evelyn might have said something in the morning to give Jem pain, and that a few words now would set the matter right. Also it might be that Evelyn

wished to tell him of Cyril's reported engagement. In either case, she resolved not to find the book too quickly.

No sooner was the door shut, than Evelyn said, "You have heard bad news."

"It may not be—"

"But so far as you know—Is Mr. Trevelyan ill again?"

"No."

"Jean may be back any moment. You will not keep me in suspense! Something has happened to one of them."

"Or—to both!"

"Yes! I can bear to be told. Go on, please."

No answer came, and she asked, "Is it illness?"

"No."

"Or accident?"

Jem rose, with an involuntary motion, and turned away. He could not endure to bring sorrow to her. To bring sorrow to any one was great pain; but this was heartrending.

She only believed him to be overcome by the greatness of whatever calamity had befallen them. The tie between him and either her brother or Jean's father was not of so close a nature that she would have expected intense distress on his part! Yet intense distress was written on every line of his face.

It surprised Evelyn a little; though, of course, he would feel acutely for Jean—so kind and sympathetic as he was known

to be, even while she individually had found him somewhat cold. All this passed in a flash through Evelyn's mind, together with countless conjectures. She too rose, and went to the door, which she quietly bolted. Then coming to Jem, in the bow-window, she scanned him earnestly with eyes more widely open than usual under the shock of sudden fear, trying to read in his look what he would not or could not say.

"You will not keep me in suspense," she repeated. "See—I can bear it. Nothing can be worse than what I am fancying now. No small matter would touch you like this! Is it the very worst?"

She laid a hand on Jem's arm, not dreaming how her light touch shook the very being of the man. "Is it—? I am waiting to know."

"The 'Spanish Gipsy'—" and a break—"has gone down—with all on board."

"None saved!"

"Not one."

He thought Evelyn would have fainted, but she did not.

"Thanks—no—I am not ill," she said in a low voice, as a slight gesture on his part showed the expectation. She grew colourless, and there was a deep sigh, but she stood firm. "Then, if—if they were on board—"

"We have no certainty that they were."

"They had made up their minds, I am afraid."

"A dozen things may have intervened—to prevent—"

"Yes—if—" and another sigh. "Poor boy!"

"If I could but have kept it from you—at least till we were sure!"

The look she gave him was very sweet. "Thanks—I know you would do all you could," she said, with a momentary wonder that she should ever have called him cold. "But indeed I am not thinking of myself. Jean must not know."

"Impossible to hide it. Captain Lucas happened to hear by private telegram. He had a cousin on board; and he has a friend at the head-office. To-morrow morning it will be in the papers."

"Then you must countermand your papers for to-morrow morning. It is the only thing to do. Jean will think they have been forgotten. And I will take her away—at once. Not too far, but abroad—to Rouen, I think. We could get home quickly from there—if—but Jean must not hear yet—till we know! To lose—both—at one blow! It would be too terrible!"

Jem did not at once reply. He had seldom passed through a sharper ordeal than this interview. The whole force of his powerful will was needed to restrain the rush of feeling, aroused by her look of sorrow, to hold back words and looks which must have revealed his love. He had long ceased to ask whether or no he loved Evelyn. He knew only too well that he never had loved, and never could love, any other woman. Hitherto he had not shown his love; nor did he now: though to hide it at such a moment, to keep up a merely kind and interested manner, taxed his self-control to the utmost. If Evelyn had never seen him so pale, she had also never seen him more composed—in feature; but the struggle brought on trembling; and Jem was thankful when Evelyn sat down, so that he might do the same.

"You will help me, will you not?" she went on earnestly.
"Jean must not know yet. If the loss has to be borne, she will bear it; only we must spare her the uncertainty. You will send a telegram, of course, to Melbourne, to know if they started."

Jem signified assent.

"I suppose the answer will hardly arrive for a day or two; and you could forward it at once to Rouen. Jean will be out of reach there of gossip. Will you help me to arrange things? I am not very well, and a little trip abroad might be expected to do me good. Don't you think so? Look—" and she held out her hand—"you see how thin I have grown. Jean noticed that; and you can say that I need a change. Say anything you like, only make her come with me to-morrow. She will understand the need not to put off, if we go at all."

Jem took in his own the offered hand, and viewed critically the frail fingers, as Jean had done.

Evelyn became aware of his trembling; and it seemed to her not quite consistent with her theory of Jem's inviolable composure. A momentary feeling of surprise was created.

But the next instant, he dropped her hand, saying—

"Yes, you are much too thin."

"And you will help me?"

"If I can do anything. I should be glad to spare Jean."

"That is it! Just to spare her needless suspense."

Then Evelyn told him briefly the tale of Cyril's supposed engagement; and Jem had time to master himself while listening.

"I do not believe it," he said at the end.

"I used to think it would be Jean."

"I think so too—" A pause, and an involuntary "If—"

Some one had tried the door once, in vain; and some one now tried it softly a second time. Evelyn hastily sketched her plan of action, obtained Jem's sanction, and summoned Jean.

It was not Jean's fashion to raise needless difficulties. She guessed that some particular cause underlay the sudden scheme; and she conjectured that the cause might be Cyril's rumoured engagement. Rather absurd if it were so—to treat her like a feeble inane creature, not able to endure a brief uncertainty without the distraction of a week or two abroad. But Jean was wisely silent as to her own conjectures, and accepted the plan as it was meant.

If the trip would do Evelyn good, and if Evelyn wanted her, she would go. Next day!—Rather soon, but she could be ready. Better soon, because then she could get back in time to welcome her father, if he should return by Suez. Jean assented with the utmost cheerfulness; and on their way home, noting how ill Jem looked, she would not bother him with a single question.

CHAPTER III.

IF IT WERE TRUE?

"All pain must be to work some good in the end."

R.

BROWNING.

"JEAN, are you getting tired of Rouen?"

"After four days in the place? No—why should I?"

"People don't always wait for a particular reason. It is rather stupid for you here. If I could go about more—"

"Well, yes—if you had a little more strength than a wren! When we get home, I shall put you into Dr. Ingram's hands."

"No use. There are—some things—which a doctor can't touch. What if I don't go home at all at present?"

"Rouen has not done you such an amount of good that you need wish to stay. I don't believe there is anything very wrong—only you are weak, and you want building up. I think you fret about people too much."

"My dear, you always were the personification of wisdom! Now pull the shawl over my feet, and run down to the

coffee-room for a change. That nice old Mrs. Newnham is sure to be there. If not, you must come back. You might even arrange for a walk with her daughter. No, I cannot have you wandering about alone. You are not so elderly as you think: and this is not Dulveriford."

Jean arranged the shawl, and vanished. They had a little private sitting-room: though, for Jean's sake, Evelyn had chosen to dine at the table d'hôte, where they had formed a slight acquaintance with one old lady. Jean found her, as Evelyn had expected, but the daughter was already gone out, and Mrs. Newnham was no walker. So she resigned herself to the inevitable, and after a short chat, sat down at a table near one of the windows.

She could there amuse herself with a pile of papers and serials, or study French manners in the quaint street. Intrinsically, a Frenchman is diverse from an Englishman: and he always looks different—even in his mode of getting along a pavement. The gait and air of the one can hardly be mistaken for those of the other. Jean sometimes tried to analyse the difference, and found it difficult. Not even a waxed moustache, a sallow skin, and a pair of mobile shoulders, will turn an Englishman into a Frenchman. The distinction is more subtle in kind.

"And so much the better!" cogitated Jean, who, like most of her countrywomen, are apt to find everything abroad a little inferior to its counterpart at home.

She turned over a pile of newspapers, her mind running on the continued cessation of letters from the absentees, and reverting with a troublesome persistence to the report about Cyril. Jean could not put that story aside. It remained as an ever-present consciousness; not mastering her

moods, for she was equably cheerful; but never out of sight.

Lilias Mackenzie! A pretty name: and a pretty girl. Dark-eyed and small, like Emmie Lucas! Well: why not? He might do worse. It was true that she had heard Cyril express a particular admiration for dark eyes—to Jean herself, whose eyes were not dark, but pale brown with spokes of green. He had made the remark at the Academy, when looking at some black-orbed dame on canvas.

Then she recalled her last parting with Cyril: the prolonged pressure of her hand: the expression of his face! More than that, the evening interview not long before, when he had resolutely declared that he never could or would marry anyone but Jean. Would he not? How much were such assertions worth? Time alone could show . . . Jean remembered how he had since devoted himself to the care of her father; how he had nursed the sick man like a daughter; how he had taken Mr. Trevelyan at his own cost for a trip to the South Sea Islands; how he had written to her, constantly and fully, week by week; how he had done or appeared to do all in his power to prove himself worthy of her confidence. And now, at the first break in their correspondence, at the first breath of gossip, Jean's trust threatened to fail.

"But it shall not," she said firmly to herself. "He deserves something better. I will not doubt him, till I have real reason."

The old lady, watching from a distance, wondered what had brought so fair a glow to the girl's singular eyes. She was greatly interested in Jean. Jean, unconscious of being observed, and forgetful of another's presence, drew from her pocket a letter always carried here—the first received

from her father, after his long illness in Melbourne. In it, he told briefly what Cyril had been to him through that trying time.

"I have not really known the boy till now," he wrote; "yet I thought I did—after all these months together. Jean herself could hardly have done more. I have never been allowed to want a thing. It was no use to suggest his leaving me more to the nurse, and taking his pleasure. She was no great shakes, certainly, and Cyril did not trust her. He was with me most of the day, and often at night; and if I remonstrated, his answer was, 'For Jean's sake!' Strange to say, he, never seemed overdone. Womanly gentleness is beautiful, but when conjoined with manly strength, it is past praise. He is growing into a fine fellow—a thorough man, body and mind."

This was not quite the Cyril of Jean's knowledge—the coddled pet of Sybella, ready always to take care of himself.

"But Jem has often said there was more in Cyril than appeared. It is not fair to doubt him, without full proof—and I will not!" she repeated resolutely.

The glow of renewed confidence lent at once a different aspect to life.

Turning over another sheet, she came on a copy of the English "Times."

"Days old! Quite ancient! The very morning we left. I remember—the papers were late that day, and I did not see them before we started."

Jean skimmed column after column, to pass the time: her brain still busy in its back regions with Cyril.

"They will soon reach home now, if they really are off in the 'Spanish Gipsy.' A few weeks, I suppose—six or seven. Not likely that they should change, after once making up their minds; unless that story were true. But I will not believe it, until I know. If we should hear that they have actually started, then I shall be sure it is false. Cyril would never think of such a voyage—without need—if he were just engaged. My father could as well come home alone . . . The only thing is that fancy for Emmie Lucas! Otherwise I could laugh at the tale. Well—Emmie is heart-whole! That is one comfort. No harm done there."

Jean had an abrupt singular consciousness of receiving a blow. It might almost have been an actual physical blow, judged by sensation. Thought was scattered; and a grey haze descended on all around, coming like the fall of dusk. She sat motionless, gazing at the paper; hardly feeling; certainly not reasoning. The heavy blow came first, numbing her faculties, before the actual sense of those terrible words seemed to reach her understanding.

"LOSS OF THE 'SPANISH GIPSY!'"

The haze grew blacker, then partly cleared: and Jean read on:

"LOSS OF THE 'SPANISH GIPSY,' WITH ALL ON BOARD."

Not one saved! So much was clear. Jean's mind refused to grasp any further particulars. She was dazed with the shock, and could only watch fixedly, like a fascinated creature, the convolutions of the neat black letter-press, which took strange forms before her eyes, one shape dissolving into another, after the mode of kaleidoscope figures. Then she was far away from Rouen, out in the open sea; and great waves arose, dashing wildly; and there were

men, struggling, sinking—and Cyril's face, a blanched dead face, below the cruel breakers.

"I hope nothing is wrong, Miss Trevelyan! No ill news?"

Mrs. Newnham's question broke into Jean's vision, and with a strong effort she recalled herself, looked up, and answered quietly—

"The loss of the 'Spanish Gipsy.'"

"Ah, yes, to be sure—on the way home from Australia. Very shocking, was it not? Poor things! I hope no friends of yours happened to be on board."

Jean was silent.

"Such a sad event! And I dare say many of them had been out for years. After a bad storm, was it not?"

"I—don't know."

"Yes; that was it. I remember. There have been so many casualties lately; but I remember. Another ship, the 'Shannon,' had been signalled, and was coming to their help, because the 'Spanish Gipsy' had been so much disabled. And all at once, it was seen to capsize and go down. Not a moment's warning, and not a person saved. The 'Shannon' was too far-off to get to the spot in time—though it does seem strange that none of the sailors should have been able to keep afloat. Those things do happen sometimes: but it is really very dreadful—quite terrible."

Jean could not talk of the horror which had fallen upon her. And the pitter-patter of conventional pity, looking blandly on from a comfortable distance, was only a degree less

insupportable than the pitter-patter of conventional condolence would be.

She went back to the brief awful paragraph, which might mean so much to her. If they had started in the "Spanish Gipsy!" It all hinged there. One hand was put up to shield her face: and Mrs. Newnham, taking the hint, sank into silence.

Did the others know of this? Was it for this that Evelyn had hurried her away?

"So kindly meant! But what use?" she asked despairingly. "Nothing can undo it! And how can I bear to be here—out of reach? How can Evelyn bear it? If news were to come—But she will not wish to stay now—now I know it."

Jean passed quickly out of the room, sending no glance towards the old lady, whose very existence she had forgotten, and hastened upstairs. Entering the room, she found herself face to face with—Jem!

Jean showed no surprise, and forgot to shake hands. It seemed perfectly natural that Jem should be there. She came near, without a word, not knowing how altered was her own look. A quick interchange of glances passed between the other two. It was evident to both of them that Jean had some idea of the truth. Evelyn, much distressed, laid her hands on Jean's, which were rigid as iron.

"Mr. Trevelyan has so kindly come, dear," she faltered, "to—to see—if we—"

"No, no! To tell us—" urged Jean hoarsely. "To tell us—"

"Yes: to tell us just a little more. You are right. Dear Jean, we have tried to keep it from you, till we could be sure—and

we are not really sure yet. But I am afraid—Have you guessed anything?"

"Not guessed! A paper—downstairs—" Jean had difficulty in saying the words. Her throat seemed to close with the effort; and she waited impatiently for them to speak.

"What did the paper say?" Jem was uncertain still how much she understood. "Something about the 'Spanish Gipsy'?"

"I know! I know! Gone down! And they—they—they—" She turned on him a face of agony.

"Tell her!" begged Evelyn, bursting into tears. "O tell her quickly."

"We cannot be absolutely certain of anything yet," Jem said, in his quietest manner. "I want you to understand this—not to be sure, until we really know. Still, I am afraid things do look bad. I sent a telegram to Melbourne the day you came away, asking whether or no they had started, and the answer has been unaccountably delayed. It ought to have arrived in a few hours, and I did not get it till this morning. But—"

"Yes! Yes! But—" repeated Jean hoarsely. "Go on!"

"It is very short—only two words, and no particulars given. 'Both off!'—that is all it says. Whether by long sea or by Suez we cannot tell. There is no mention of the 'Spanish Gipsy.' I am disappointed to hear so little, and I have sent a second telegram asking for more information. It ought to come quickly—but meantime I hardly felt that it would be right to delay telling you—or at least Mrs. Villiers—what I had heard. So I came away at once. If only I could have brought something better!"

"Both! Both at once! Oh, it can't be! Not both!"

Evelyn's sobs were distressing: but Jean shed no tears. She looked bewildered.

"Impossible! Not both! Evelyn, don't cry so! What is the good? They will come home. It couldn't be—both of them!" Then to Jem—"We must go back at once. I can't stay here. You will take us—will you not? We could reach Dieppe in time—for the night-boat, I mean. I'll help Anderson. Evelyn needn't touch a thing. Only please not to stay here. Evelyn dear, don't let us."

She wrung her hands together, with a strange forlorn gesture, unlike Jean.

"Don't talk to me—about that, I mean! Don't pity me! We must not stop to think of anything—only just get off—and then—I don't want water, Jem! What is that for? You don't suppose I'm hysterical, do you? But I'll drink some, if you like. It doesn't matter. I only want to get away as fast—as fast as possible. And then—Evelyn, do, do stop crying! I don't know how to bear it. And what is the use? They must come home! It couldn't be—both of them! Don't hold me, please. I want to go."

"One word first! Jean, listen to me. The Mrs. Parkinson who wrote last week about Cyril being engaged, has written again; and now she contradicts that—says it is untrue!"

Jean's face relaxed its rigidity.

"She did mean Lilias Mackenzie—and Lilias Mackenzie is engaged to somebody else. Mrs. Parkinson saw Cyril, and she says he was all impatience to get home—so eager to be off."

"Poor Cyril!" whispered Jean, every feature quivering.

"He was true to you—I am sure he was."

"He—is true!"

Jean disengaged herself, stooped to kiss Evelyn, and was gone.

Half-an-hour later she reappeared, almost her usual self; only with reddened eyes and strained look; still urgently entreating to start immediately. For almost the first time in her life, she forgot to think of others, under the pull of this intense desire. Evelyn made no difficulties; and Jem believed that to be on the move might be best for both of them. As Jean had said, they could reach Dieppe in time for the night-packet, which did not start till after one o'clock in the morning.

CHAPTER IV.

ROUGH WINDS.

"Loud the angry wind was wailing."

LONGFELLOW.

JEM had crossed the Channel many a time, but he had never known a rougher passage. Until they were well out of Dieppe harbour, nobody—not even the experienced Captain—had imagined what the force of wind and wave would be: or certainly Jem would have insisted on delay, notwithstanding Jean's impatience to be off. Such weather is rare in May, when one expects to have done with the worst gales of winter and spring.

Repeatedly in the slow hours of that boisterous night and early morning, Jem wished that they had not come. The trip bid fair to outlast considerably its orthodox length of four hours. Dawn was beginning to break, and they were still in mid-Channel, only about half-way over. The sea was so heavy, that it had been early found needful, for safety's sake, to slow down the engines; and advance was tardy. A large proportion of the passengers were too entirely prostrated by sea-sickness to pay close heed to the flight of time: but Jem and Jean were first-rate sailors.

Jem retired only for an hour or two; then he came once more on deck, preferring to keep watch. It was no easy matter to maintain footing on a floor which each instant assumed some new slope, trying almost every conceivable position except the horizontal. He soon ensconced himself in the most sheltered spot he could find, not far from the companion-hatch, there to study at leisure the conflict of forces.

Faint gleams of light stole over the waste of watery hills—a grey landscape of long broken ranges, sliding swiftly one after another in a never-ending progression from the west-north-west. Snow-tipped summits reared themselves, mountain-like, the dark crests being rent into white foam, and torn away by the gale. It was a scene never for two instants the same, yet ever repeating itself, as vast bluffs of

water rolled past and under—sometimes partly over—the straining vessel. Each time a sea was shipped, there was, with the shock of concussion, a rush of the broken wave.

Jem escaped, in his corner, most of the flow, but he came in for drenching showers of spray; and rug and macintosh failed to keep him dry. Still he sat on: and but for certain saddening circumstances, he would have enjoyed the hurly-burly of excited elements.

He was grieved both for Evelyn and Jean: yet no doubt it was Evelyn mainly who filled his thoughts. Matters in that direction had of late severely tried Jem's fortitude. To see Evelyn in trouble, and not do his utmost to comfort her, was hard of endurance. It was the old pain of years gone by, revived and intensified. If Evelyn were happy, he could bear bravely for himself the long suffering of life apart from her; but if she were sad, he was wretched. Perhaps not many men love so unselfishly.

All the hours of this stormy night, she was never out of his mind. He had gone through a spell of fierce battling, during many months past, unknown to those with whom he lived; and things were nearing a climax. Jem had felt lately that the fight was too sore for him. Health and spirit threatened to break down beneath it. A question as to his future had arisen in the shape of an offered living—a large London Parish, among the very poor, yet not so far East that he might not, perhaps, venture to have his mother with him, for at least part of the year. The income, though less than that of Dutton, would still enable him to keep her in comfort.

For three days he had carried the letter about, unable to arrive at any decision. Now, he determinately faced the

matter, alone in semi-darkness, on the heaving deck, with a world of troubled waters around.

In the light of threatened separation, he found out how he had grown to depend on occasional meetings with Evelyn—a glimpse here; a word or smile there—to carry him on. He discovered how desolate life would be without her, beyond reach of her sweet face and voice. A life not worth living, he could almost have said—if any good and right feeling man might dare to say such words, in the blaze of his responsibilities, and of the work given him to do.

"The more need for me to leave Dutton! It is making me useless," was what Jem did say. Few would have endorsed the assertion, yet it expressed a positive danger.

He never had sought to win her: so much Jem could aver. He had resolutely restrained himself; had treated her with mere grave kindness and courtesy; nay, he had even forced a certain sternness, a certain coldness, to cover his burning devotion. The love of a strong man of thirty-five, which has slowly grown for years, in the face of hopeless obstacles, is no light thing. Jem was not like Cyril. He could never hesitate as to whom he loved. Once and again, with all the force of his vigorous Trevelyan nature, he had stamped his passion under foot, and had for a while counted it slain; but always, like a phoenix from the ashes, it had sprung up anew: and at last, he had ceased to think of destroying a thing of such vitality. So far he had been able to hold it in leash. Now, nothing remained but to flee.

Which would mean a manner of slow dying—the death of all joy in life, except such joys as are unearthly. Jem had them in possession!

Only money stood between, to hinder his seeking and perhaps winning her—but it was a potent "only." If she married him, she would lose her all, beyond a mere pittance—so Jem believed—and what had he to offer her instead? Not even Dutton living for life! Whether or no, he accepted this present offer—and there seemed no reason for not doing so—he counted himself in a manner devoted to East-End work, for sooner or later . . . Evelyn the wife of a clergyman, with narrow income, toiling in back-slums! Jem could not picture it. Yet there might be capabilities in that fair creature, not yet developed; and Jem had seen in her some faint dawnings of a high spirit of self-devotion.

Had he had any reason to believe that she loved him, unsought—then of course he would have spoken: then of course he would have given her at least the choice. But he had no reason to believe anything of the kind; and he could not in conscience set himself to win her.

Another watery mountain, towering above its compeers, swept up, and struck the steamer with a force which made every plank in her to vibrate. When the rush of water and the hail of spray had cleared, Jem became presently aware of a difference in the sum-total of sounds. The steady throb of the engines was ceasing. He waited a few minutes, not flurried though anxious; but it did not recommence, and he went aft, to make enquiries.

"Jean! You here!" Coming back to his seat, he found her.

"Don't scold me, please. I could not stay down any longer."

"It is not fit for you on deck."

"I can't go back directly—the hatches are closed again. And I would rather not. We are so boxed up below. Some gentlemen were coming up, to ask what had happened; and one of them was kind and helped me. I wanted to find you: and when I saw your rug, I knew you would soon be back."

Jem wrapped her round with the said rug.

"I don't want it," protested Jean uselessly. "I have my waterproof. Why have the engines stopped?"

"Something wrong with the starboard paddle-wheel."

"I don't understand."

"That green wave did a lot of damage—carried away the driving-arm, and broke the radial rods. It is what they call a 'feathering paddle-wheel.' There is nothing now to control the floats. The fear is, if the engines are started again, that the loose floats may break in the side of the steamer."

"And—sink us?"

"Things might come to that."

"What are we to do?"

"Let ourselves drift for a time. There seems to be no other choice. The risk of using the paddle-wheel is too great to be ventured on—unless as a last resource; and we have not come to last resources yet. So long as we have plenty of sea-room, we are hardly in actual danger. The difficulty is as to steering. The sea breaks through the wheel incessantly. But they are contriving some sort of apparatus, to prevent our drifting too fast, and to keep the boat's head to the wind."

"When shall we reach Newhaven?"

"Not much hope of Newhaven at present. With this head-wind, I suppose we shall drift over towards the French coast—and up Channel. By-and-bye we may fall in with some other steamer, and be taken in tow . . . It is patience-trying."

"If I had not been so bent in coming by this boat—!"

"Something else might have happened, equally unpleasant. Nobody knew, till we were off, how rough it would be. There's a grand wave! . . . You won't often see a finer sight! . . . Sit close! We shall be drenched! . . . Whew!"

"I should enjoy it—any other time!"

"Remember, there is no absolute certainty—about them, I mean! At the last moment they may have changed their plans, and come by Suez."

"Not if the passage were taken. Why should they? . . . Is it any use to let myself hope?"

Jem had no difficulty in hearing Jean's clear intonation, even through the babel of wind and water. Conversation was perforce fitful, containing many breaks: but the two were as quiet as if seated in Dutton Rectory study.

Jean's next words came after an interval—

"Drowning is not a painful death, is it?"

"No, not painful. This is generally agreed upon, I think . . . Would you not be wiser to leave details, till we know more? One goes through needless misery sometimes, picturing what has never happened. They and we are in our Father's

Hands. Try to remember that—and to trust . . . What do you think of my going back to London work?"

"And leaving Dutton?"

"I have had an offer of a living."

Jean was buried in thought, and Jem had ceased to expect an answer, when she said—

"I shall have to come and work there too—if—You would let me, would you not? Unless Evelyn and I came and lived together! It has been her dream for years."

"Mrs. Villiers!"

"She said so the other day! . . . Oh, what a wave!"

"Hold fast! . . . Yes—you were saying—"

"She has often talked so—especially of late. Evelyn gets so tired of her present life. She would like to give it all up, and take to East-End work as a vocation . . . I don't think the wish is only restlessness. Sometimes she talks as if were—but that is because she is so honest—so afraid of laying claim to higher motives than she has. Evelyn does think and feel very deeply—and her religion is always so true—though she talks very little. I am sure the wish is a real wish; not mere disgust with Dutton and the Park . . . Isn't it strange that Cyril should have written so often lately of London work of that kind? He says he can't settle down at his age to a do nothing existence at the Brow. He would like to spend part of the year in Town, and look into all sorts of questions, and help a little to improve things at the East-End. But no use talking," murmured Jean. "When perhaps —"

Jem hardly heard the last few words. That which she said about Evelyn stirred him strongly, seeming to clothe the condition of things with a new vesture of possibilities.

Four o'clock in the afternoon, and still the hapless passengers were at sea, exposed to the fury of wind and wave. Hour after hour had crept by; and the "Bristol," with her damaged wheel and silent engines, drifted slowly, log-like, across the Channel, and towards the French coast.

One friendly steamer, the "Achilles," had been signalled in the course of the morning, and had come to their aid. With great delay and difficulty, and no small peril of a collision, she had been manœuvred into a position near enough alongside to take on board the tow-rope of the "Bristol." For a while hopes rose high; but in so heavy a sea, the strain proved to be too great.

After two hours, the powerful hawser snapped as if made of tinder; and to pick it up again was not possible. The wind had by this time fallen to some extent; but the seas still chased one another in mountainous grey ridges with wearisome monotony.

Though the "Achilles" could do no more, she showed her sympathy by lingering long in the neighbourhood of the hapless vessel; till indeed the fast-nearing outline of the French coast, and an ominous line of breakers on a rocky shore, seen in glimpses between the rising and falling of watery heights, spoke of peril to both steamers. Then the "Achilles" was compelled for her own safety to stand out to sea: and the "Bristol" drifted alone.

Passengers and crew had behaved well thus far. There were several ladies among the former, and some had been much overcome: yet weeping was quiet, screaming and hysterics were unknown. Many were still suffering too severely from mal de mer to pay attention to surrounding circumstances: while others knew of the now pressing danger, and bore it calmly.

Boats were in readiness for launching; life-belts were either donned or kept at hand by a large proportion of those on board: and one gentleman had already pulled off his heavy boots, in preparation for a swim.

Among those able to be on deck were not only Jean and Jem, but also Evelyn. She had rallied from her weakness, the near peril acting as a tonic, and had insisted on leaving the cabin. It might be that a summons would soon reach all below to follow her example. Jem had helped her to his favourite corner, the most sheltered attainable: and he sat beside her, keeping careful watch over her comfort. He looked worn with his long night-watch and inward battling, but a vivid light shone in his eyes, as they drew closer to the coast. To die with Evelyn seemed to him no terrible matter; not half so terrible as to cut himself asunder from her, living.

Evelyn had her gentlest and most fragile aspect; and her large eyes watched with fascinated eagerness the rolling up and past of each great wave which tossed and heaved their boat, like a huge log, on its bosom. Yet fear was not in her face; rather a restful quiet might be found there. Jean, standing at a short distance, keeping her feet in a manner which no other woman on that sloping deck could emulate, saw this with silent wonder. She had expected more of physical fear and shrinking on Evelyn's part. Could it be, not only that to Evelyn's gentle spirit the great transition now

threatening was not a matter for dread, but also that under Jem's watchful care a new content had arisen. The thought came, which strangely had never before occurred to Jean—did Evelyn love Jem?

"Another half hour, and we shall be on the rocks!" a passenger said aloud.

Evelyn heard, and her glance went in appeal to Jem.

"Hardly so soon," he answered.

"Can nothing be done?"

"The engines will be set going. I do not suppose the Captain will wait much longer."

"And if the wheel breaks in the side of the steamer—That is feared, is it not?"

"Yes. Then we should have, probably, to take to the boats."

"Would the boats live in this sea?" asked Evelyn.

"That is the question."

A faint smile came to her lips, drawn there by something in Jem's look.

"Jean must be your first care," she said.

"None can be my care before you! Jean too of course. If we take to the boats, we will keep together—all three of us."

"But if you could not save us both—Jean must be first. She is so young. And for Cyril's sake!" urged Evelyn. "It does not matter so much for me. I have had my life, you know . . . And sometimes I think—One would not wish to choose;

but going Home early would solve many difficulties. If it were God's will for me, I mean. I don't think I have been so very happy."

"Ought you not to have been?"

"Why—'ought'? I am so alone—for years past, always alone. People seem to think money is all one needs; but I care little for wealth. If you knew how little! It is only a burden . . . I should like to thank you now for what you said to me, one day lately—the day we met and had a talk. It opened my eyes to a good deal. If we get through this, I am resolved to live a different life—not for myself any more. So many need helping; and I should like to help them. I will find some work to do."

Jem's answer was more of a reply than might appear on the surface: "I have thoughts of going back to London."

"To leave Dutton?"

"It will be best."

"For Dutton? Or for yourself?"

"For both, perhaps; certainly for myself. There are difficult elements in my life at Dutton; and I have always felt that my true work lay among the London poor."

"Ah—I have always felt that that was a life worth living!"

"Any life may be, and ought to be, worth living, if there is a right motive-power."

Jem said this almost mechanically. Recollections of a long past scene flashed through his mind; of a meeting in the gorge; of the General's fair young wife looking with sad

eyes, as she said, "It must be a splendid life—a life worth living—so different from most people's lives!"

The remembrance stirred Jem strongly. He almost forgot his present position; and a new impulse came over him, to speak out, not to leave her in ignorance of his love. What Jean had said of Evelyn, and what Evelyn now said of herself, seemed to place matters on a new level. Jem could hardly have told what he thought or expected; only the fresh impulse was overpowering; and he seemed to be suddenly freed from binding shackles. Perhaps in the near prospect of possible death, questions of more or less money grew small, as if seen through a reversed binocular; perhaps the long night and day had unstrung him; perhaps Evelyn's unconscious confiding wistfulness of look and manner had most to do with the breaking down of his resolution. One way or another, he heard his own voice saying, almost without premeditation—

"If I were not poor—and if you were not rich—I should have asked if you could share that work with me. But as things are—"

A moment's silence; and then—"Why not?"

Jem glanced up, hardly able to believe his own ears. Below the surface, he was tempest-tossed; long pent-up forces surging in billows like those grey heights around. A dazzle of light filled the murky air, and everything was pulsating with a new vividness of life and hope. He grew excessively pale; yet he spoke with restrained utterance:

"Because it would be asking you to give up everything—in exchange for nothing!"

"But if I do not value the 'everything'? And if that 'nothing' is perhaps 'something' to me?"

"You must understand! I have only my stipend—and my mother to support. Don't you see?" asked Jem, with less composure.

The throb of the silent engines seemed to have passed into his brain; and he scarcely knew what he said under this strange clang of sound and brightness of light, through which he heard Evelyn's low tones, inaudible to everybody else, and saw her sweet face, fair still to him as in all the freshness of her lovely girlhood; while the rush of wind and water faded into nothingness.

"I did not mean to say this! I hardly know why—except—The thing cannot be—ought not to be! . . . Still—if we should not get through—or if you are saved, and not I—then I should like you to know that I have loved you for years—have loved you always. I have never loved any other—since the day that I first saw you, coming over the stepping-stones!"

"So long ago! All those years!" said Evelyn.

A bright rose-colour flushed her cheeks, and the deep blue eyes, looked up at Jem, had lost their unsatisfied craving.

"And I thought you almost despised me—looked down on what seemed to you my butterfly life."

"When I would have given all I had—any day—for a look or a word! But you mean—you think—" Jem could hardly speak—"you mean, you could give up—you think you could learn to love me?"

"I think I have learnt that already," she answered softly. "And the giving up would be no giving up—because of what I should have in exchange."

The engines had been started again, as they talked, and now so terrific a clamour of sound burst from the damaged wheel, as it began slowly to revolve, that Jem's reply was lost. What matter? Enough had been said!

CHAPTER V.

SUCCEEDING CALM.

"She's beautiful, and therefore to be woo'd:
She's a woman, and therefore to be won."

SHAKESPEARE.

THE dreaded peril did not develop into fact. Those massive loose floats, made of steel and weighing between two and three tons, though they struck heavily, with a frightful crash, against the framework, did little injury to the side of the vessel. The steamer drew gradually away from the threatening line of breakers; and thenceforward the worst was over. So often the thing which we most fear does not come upon us.

Jem had telegraphed home before starting; and he well knew what his mother's anxiety would be, at this long delay in their arrival; but nothing could be done. Until they should

reach port, no word could be sent. They were cut off from communication with the civilised world.

Progress homeward had to be of the most tardy description, since the Captain dared only to use the engines at their slowest rate. It was a matter of snail-like creeping, inch by inch, little more than a mile an hour; and another dreary night had to be lived through by the suffering passengers. Only Evelyn and Jem seemed none the worse—nay, rather, much the better—for their uncomfortable experience.

Jean gazed wonderingly at them both many times in the course of the evening; but she asked no questions, and they would not thrust their new-found joy into her burden of fear and sorrow.

Evelyn could sleep that second night peacefully as a child; but not Jean. She came on deck before breakfast, looking haggard. The wind had changed and gone down; and the sea had grown more still, heaving in sleepy billows, like the tired sighs of a child after a fit of passion.

"How soon do we get in? The engines are stopping again," Jean said, a despairing under-tone audible.

Jem showed a small steamer near at hand. "A tug at last! We shall be all right now. Our little friend will tow us to Newhaven."

"I thought we were to land somewhere else."

"So it was said yesterday; but we go to Newhaven, after all. I am glad for your sake. If a telegram has arrived, it will be sent there to meet us."

"I have had a lesson, at all events, not to be wilful again," said Jean. "If I had not been so bent on getting off—"

"It is nearly over now, I hope. Have you had anything to eat?"

"No. Why won't you let me blame myself?"

"So you shall, if it is a relief. But there is another side to the question. I shall be thankful all my life that we did come."

"By this boat?"

"By this particular boat! If we had not, Evelyn and I might never—"

Jem paused, and Jean repeated—"Evelyn!"

"I may call her so now."

"Then it is that! I almost fancied—and yet—O Jem, I am glad!—Glad somebody is happy! And Cyril would have been so pleased."

"Will be—perhaps. We won't give up hope yet."

"I have not much left. But this—is it real? You mean it!"

"Nothing was ever more real. I don't wonder you ask the question. I keep putting it to myself. All is changed—like a bewildering dream. I didn't know what capacities for happiness I had! . . . Yes, it is real—that she loves me—better than Dutton Park."

"And you will stay in Dutton?"

"I think not. There is no need. We both long for London work; and Evelyn has more of her own than I knew. A legacy of £600 a year was left her lately by the General's brother-in-law. Marriage will not touch that. So we can afford to provide for my mother, if she likes a country home

best; and somebody else will be as well fitted as I am to look after the old ladies of Dutton."

Jem could not resist the little flash of fun; but he grew instantly apologetic.

"Forgive me! It must sound so heartless. But if you knew what this is to me—after years of utter hopelessness!"

"I think I do know; and you could never be heartless," Jean answered.

To Evelyn, a little later, she murmured—"So this is what has been the matter with you lately—not poor Miss Moggridge, after all!" and Evelyn offered no protest.

A small tug, with a large steamer in tow, could not be expected to advance rapidly; and the "Bristol" had drifted far out of her course; but the sea being now comparatively smooth, the Captain preferred to make his own port.

Passengers, eager to be on land, were disposed to grumble; yet the delay involved was not very great. There was no longer any question of danger; only of patience. People might eat and drink and enjoy themselves, so far as certain physical sensations permitted.

It was growing dusky, when late in the afternoon, they reached the Newhaven harbour. An eager crowd of battered and weather-beaten voyagers pressed across the gangway, anxious to reach firm ground. Evelyn, clinging to Jem's arm, seemed to care little whether she were on deck or on land; and Jem could scarcely turn his mind to aught else beside Evelyn. Still they did not forget Jean, and if she stood apart, she was at once beckoned near.

After crossing the gangway, however, while in the midst of a dense crowd, Jean was forcibly separated from her companions, and hustled backward. She had little spirit to struggle; and though not much liking to find herself alone, she could hardly be called nervous. When able to move forward again, she looked about in vain for Evelyn and Jem. Had they gone on, forgetfully? Jean smiled at the idea; yet a forlorn wave swept over her, not for the first time that day. The contrast between their happiness and what might be in store for herself was almost too painful.

In the growing darkness, and in the throng, she still failed to catch a glimpse of her companions. Jean began to feel uncomfortable.

Then she found somebody by her side—somebody well covered with a large foreign-looking cloak, and wearing a rough-weather cap, pulled low over his eyes. She had a glimpse of a brown-moustached face. And an ungloved hand, well sunburnt, touched her courteously, to draw attention; while an odd gruff voice, not unfamiliar in its intonation, said—

"Pardon me! Miss Trevelyan—? Mr. Trevelyan has gone on, and he desires me to bring you to the hotel."

"Rather curious!" Jean thought; but the manner was unmistakably that of a gentleman, and Jean submitted. "A friend of Jem's!" she conjectured.

"You have had an unpleasant voyage."

"Very," Jean said, with sufficient brevity, as she walked by his side.

"Mr. Trevelyan asked me to inform you that news has come from abroad—good news."

"A telegram!"

"That—and more!"

"My father—and—"

"They did not go in the unfortunate 'Spanish Gipsy.' There was a change of plans just at last. Both are safe and well . . . I think you had better take my arm."

For a moment, Jean was rather near loss of consciousness. Long suspense and want of sleep had told upon her; but with a determined effort she rallied, after her father's fashion.

"Thanks—no need. You are sure—quite sure?"

"Perfectly. There can be no mistake. They did take their passage in the 'Spanish Gipsy;' but soon afterwards, they managed to get off—at some little sacrifice of money. The fact is, Sir Cyril had not patience. He was anxious to get home; and the long voyage meant too much delay. They would not write word of this change, thinking that it would make a pleasant surprise; and they have come straight by Suez."

"Have come! Then they are now—"

"In Newhaven! Waiting for your arrival. Mr. Trevelyan is at the hotel—and Sir Cyril—is—"

The stranger hesitated: paused near a lamp; pushed higher his penthouse of a cap; and said in a different voice—

"Jean, am I so changed?"

"Cyril!!!!"

"And so, Mabel, everything is settled, and they are all going to be married as fast as possible, don't you know?" stated Mrs. Kennedy, a few days later, to her usual confidante.

Mabel, having been absent from home, required instruction on the recent course of events.

"I don't know, I'm sure, why they should wait. Sir Cyril has plenty of money; and now that funny Mme. Collier is coming to live again at Dulveriford Rectory, why, nobody can say Jean can't be spared."

"She'll make a splendid Lady Devereux—as nice as any one could wish. As for poor Miss Devereux, why, she must just make up her mind to it. But they say she was as nice as anything when Sir Cyril came home, and cried in his arms, like I don't know what—having been so frightened about him, and all, don't you see? That does soften people sometimes. And, after all, she isn't hard—she's only just Miss Devereux. And she's to have a sweet little house built, and everything done to make her comfortable. So she can't complain."

"Not that we shall have so very much of Sir Cyril and Jean in Dutton. I can see that! They're all agog for London, and East-End work, and no end of philanthropicalness."

"It's wonderful how Sir Cyril is altered. I wouldn't have believed it—after less than two years and a half. Why, he looks positively ten years older, I do declare, Mabel; and he's bigger, and stouter, and regularly burnt brown, and he's grown a moustache, and his voice is deeper too. He's nothing like as pretty as he was. I always did say he was the prettiest boy, with the loveliest manner—but then, of

course, he can't be a boy always, don't you know, and he's got nice manners still. You can fancy how he's changed, for Jean herself didn't know him when she first saw him in the dark. But if Jean likes him better so, it's all right; and she says she does."

"As for Mr. Trevelyan, he looks quite young and strong again, and he goes striding about like a great long-legged emu!"

"And we're to lose Mr. James Trevelyan! That seems a shame, and I'm desperately sorry—though to be sure the Colonel does say he's not at all a safe young man, and poor dear Thomas shakes his head. But some people always shake their heads over everybody, don't you know; and there's nobody I'd rather hear preach; only, of course, you mustn't tell Thomas! But it does give one a sort of lift—up out of the mud, you know."

"Mrs. Trevelyan? Oh, she's to spend half the year in London with them—and half the year at the Brow. That's the plan, I'm told. She says she's so glad for 'dear Jem' she always calls him 'Dear Jem,' you know—that she can't think of herself. And Mr. James Trevelyan is all beaming, and Mrs. Villiers looks as young and lovely as she did at sixteen.

"Poor dear creatures! They all think everything is to keep straight after marriage. A sort of comfortable wind-up, don't you see, and nothing ever to go wrong again! Of course, it won't—I mean, of course it will—at least you know what I mean. Things will get crooked just as much as ever, and perhaps a lot more. Why, if nothing else happens, there's a husband to look after, and everybody knows what that means! If they don't, they soon will."

"Of course, they'll be awfully happy, dear, and it all fits in beautifully, and it's just exactly what one wishes. I always did say Mr. James Trevelyan was the right person for Mrs. Villiers; and Sir Cyril has been crazy after Jean ever since he wore knickerbockers. But, all the same, I suppose they'll have their needles and pins, like other folks. Married life isn't just nothing but plum-cake, you know."

Mrs. Kennedy's metaphors were apt to get mixed, but she smiled on in placid unconsciousness of the incongruity.

"Miss Moggridge says it's so wonderful how one event grows out of another; and I suppose it is; only it would be more wonderful still if they didn't. She's a queer sort of woman, Mabel—intellectual and all that!—but she's quite too much for me, don't you know? And she's going to live at Rome."

"So it's all settled; and now there's nothing to be done but to publish the banns, and to get the frocks and veils!"

THE END.

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